DAIRY QUEENS

Written by
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DAIRY QUEENS

WHITE LETTERS APPEAR ON BLACK:

1995 MARKED THE FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY
OF THE NATION'S OLDEST BEAUTY CONTEST...
THE JUNIOR MISS AMERICA PAGEANT

DRUM ROLL, then:

MALE HOST (V.O.)
Ladies and Gentlemen, the Junior Miss America Contestants!

FADE IN:

INT. LARGE AUDITORIUM

ROUSING PATRIOTIC MUSIC. FAST PACED CUTS feature SMILING TEENAGE CONTESTANTS dancing and waving American flags. APPLAUSE!

MALE HOST (V.O.)
The Junior Miss America Pageant has been enriching the lives of American-made girls since 1945...

Contestants DROP, ROLL and form a STAR. CHEERS!

MALE HOST (V.O. CONT)
The Junior Miss America Pageant provides personal growth, scholarship, travel -- and you might even meet a few celebrities. Last night the girls had dinner with Eric Estrada!

ZOOM IN on a CONTESTANT - she SMILES and WINKS approvingly to camera. MUSIC SWELLS. An attractive MALE HOST enters.

MALE HOST
(to camera)
At the national level, thousands of seventeen year-old girls, like yourselves, compete around the country in places like --

He turns away, covering mouth.

COMPUTER VOICE (V.O.)
-- Mount Rose, Minnesota --

He turns back to camera.

MALE HOST
-- And make it all the way here to Mobile, Alabama, to compete for the title of Junior Miss America!
(quickly)
Not affiliated with the Miss America Pageant.

Contestants strike a pose around him. THUNDEROUS CANNED APPLAUSE!

MALE HOST (CONT)
(pointing to camera)
So, which one of you will it b--

SCREEN SUDDENLY STATIC.

CUT TO:

SCENE from "DAYS OF OUR LIVES"

PULL BACK to reveal the VIDEO is on a TV in front of a GROUP OF SEVENTEEN YEAR-OLD GIRLS, sitting in gym bleachers.

[NOTE: The film is shot documentary style. PEOPLE ARE REAL. Their lives revolve around this pageant. All speak with a THICK MINNESOTA ACCENT.]

THREE "CIVIL SERVETTES," the local women's group, [Picture unattractive Stepford Wives in matching windbreakers] stand beside GLADYS LEEMAN, 34, president. She STOPS THE VIDEO.

GLADYS LEEMAN
Good God, Iris, you taped your shows over it.

IRIS
Sorry.

Gladys turns to the GIRLS in the bleachers.

SUPER: MOUNT ROSE, MINNESOTA POPULATION: 5,076

GLADYS
Yah-so ladies, the rest of the tape - which now holds nothin' but smut - goes on about startin' this great journey we call Junior Miss America...

SMASH CUT TO:

BLACK & WHITE PHOTO MONTAGE (1945) (A LA KEN BURNS)

- 18 YEAR-OLD IONA HILDEBRANDT, looking surprised with hands on cheeks, is being crowned MOUNT ROSE JUNIOR MISS AMERICA by TWO SOLDIERS on a GYM STAGE. Other CONTESTANTS look on.

IONA HILDEBRANDT (V.O.)
(smoked for sixty years)
I was Mount Rose Junior Miss America in 1945. We were at war with the Japs.

- INT. FACTORY - YOUNG IONA, wearing TIARA, stands with SOLDIERS and WAR OFFICIALS beside a boiling pot of metal.

IONA HILDEBRANDT (CONT V.O.)
I didn't even get to keep my damn tiara. Had to turn it in for scrap.

- YOUNG IONA DROPS the TIARA into the boiling pot.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - LIBRARY

IONA HILDEBRANDT - librarian, 65+ - stamps books.

SUPER: IONA HILDEBRANDT, MOUNT ROSE JUNIOR MISS AMERICA 1945

IONA HILDEBRANDT
... Yah-boy, I still smile when I think that my tiara mighta gone into the bomb that helped bring Tojo to his knees.

CUT TO:

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - GYM

Gladys still faces the girls in the bleachers.

GLADYS
... Yah-so everyone who wants to start that journey, c'mon down and sign up... Oh, and-ah, help yourselves to some coffee and bars...

CUT TO:

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - GYM - LATER

PAN DOWN row of EIGHT GIRLS signing up and eating bars.

CUT TO:

LESLIE MILLER - sexy/peppy girl in CHEERLEADING UNIFORM.

LESLIE MILLER
...Hi.
(giggles)
I'm Leslie Miller. I'm signin' up 'cause-ah, y'know, I always watch pageants on the TV and my boyfriend thinks I'll win. Hi, Pat! Go Muskies! Whooo!

She makes "gills" on the sides of her head with her hands.

CUT TO:

AMBER CONROY - naturally pretty blonde, sweet as sugar pie, stares into camera like a deer caught in headlights.

AMBER CONROY
(suddenly looking o.c.)
... Huh? Oh, sorry. I didn't know this -
(pointing finger)
meant go...
(stares for a beat, then o.c.)
Huh? Oh-now. Sorry. I-I'm Amber Conroy and, um, I'm signin' up 'cause, ah, my two favorite people in the whole world competed. My mom and Diane Sawyer... Course I hope I end up a little more like Diane Sawyer than my mom...

She flashes a GRIN, we melt.

CUT TO:

TAMMY CURRY - a cute, jock-type. She wears a LETTER JACKET, covered with VARSITY SPORTS PATCHES.

TAMMY CURRY
Tammy Curry. I'm signin' up for the scholarship'n'all.

SMASH CUT TO:

She POINTS to VARIOUS PATCHES on her LETTER JACKET.

TAMMY CURRY (CONT)
... This one's for Varsity Soccer, uh, I'm captain. (POINTING) I run track... (POINTS TO SMALL GUN PATCH) I'm President of the Lutheran Sisterhood Gun Club...

CUT TO:

LISA SWENSON - big, bubbly girl talks and eats a bar.

LISA SWENSON
...Yah-well, that's kinda like askin', "Why do all the guys chew Copenhagen?" For Christsake, if you're seventeen and you're not a total "fry," it's just what you do.

CUT TO:

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - GIRLS' BATHROOM

It's smokey as hell. THREE "FRY" GIRLS and a PREGNANT "FRY" GIRL - all with "shelf bangs" - smoke and drink.

FRY GIRL #1
...Oh, yah-right. I ain't gonna be in no fuckin' pageant for the same reason I ain't in, y'know, debate or ah... that other thing where those retreds run the projectors...

PREGNANT FRY GIRL (O.C.)
Audio Visual Club.

FRY GIRL #1
Yah-yah. Same reason - I got a fuckin' life.

PREGNANT FRY GIRL exits a stall, smoking.

PREGNANT FRY GIRL
Shit - are we on "Cops?"

CUT TO:

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - GYM

BECKY LEEMAN - pretty in a "made-up" way, VERY REHEARSED, has prepared for this all her life - smiles to camera.

BECKY LEEMAN
Hello, I'm Rebecca Leeman. I believe this pageant is an important experience for every young woman. It teaches you what's really important in life. It has the power to change you in ways you never dreamed of --

SMASH CUT TO:

EST. SHOT - "DAKOTA COUNTY EATING DISORDERS CLINIC"

MARY (V.O.)
(labored breaths)
My winning... the Mount Rose...

INT. PATIENT'S ROOM

SMILING ANOREXIC GIRL sits in bed - a TIARA in what's left of her hair and a SASH over her hospital gown.

MARY
...Junior Miss America Pageant...

SUPER: MARY JOHANSON, REIGNING MOUNT ROSE JUNIOR MISS AMERICA

MARY (CONT)
... really changed my life.

The TIARA SLIPS OFF her BALDING HEAD and rolls to the floor.

CUT TO:

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - GYM

Girls are gone. Civil Servettes sit in the bleachers, enjoying bars and coffee.

GLADYS
Oh yah-sure, I know what some of your big city, no bra wearin', hairy-legged women's libbers say...

SUPER: GLADYS LEEMAN, PRESIDENT, CIVIL SERVETTES

GLADYS (CONT)
"Pageants are old-fashioned" and, uh, and "demeaning" to the girls --

IRIS
(jumping in)
What's sick is women dressin' like men!

Civil Servettes stare at her a beat.

GLADYS
Uh... You-betcha, Iris.
(quickly, back to camera)
Yah-I think yous boys'll find that things are different here in Mount Rose...

Civil Servettes AD-LIB AGREEMENT.

GLADYS (CONT)
For one thing, y'know, we're God fearin' folk - every last one of us...

Civil Servettes AD-LIB AGREEMENT.

GLADYS (CONT)
You won't find a back room in our video store...

Servettes AD-LIB "AMEN. YAH-YOU-BETCHA." etc.

CUT TO:

B&W HIDDEN CAMERA VIDEO - IN HAT

TEENAGE "VIDEO BARN" CLERK nervously opens a supply closet to reveal XXX-rated movies. He grins, then looks suspiciously up at the HAT-CAM.

GLADYS (V.O.)
...That filth is better left in "Sin City." A-K-A, Minneapolis...

A MONTAGE BEGINS over music.

GLADYS (V.O.)
...People here buy American and, uh, and it isn't a crime to say a prayer in school - it's a God-given right. Yah-go ahead, see for yourselves, then. Mount Rose is a different kinda town. Oh, and take some bars with ya - we made plenty.

- DRIVING SHOT down QUAINT MAIN STREET.
- DRIVING SHOTS in picturesque middle-class neighborhoods.
- HAPPY FAMILY raises the AMERICAN FLAG.
- BURLY GUYS look up from washing a FORD TRUCK.
- WHITE KIDS, beating up a BLACK KID, stop to stare.
- Pass SIGN BESIDE a TRAILER PARK: "WELCOME TO MOUNT ROSE, HOME OF FREDA KLINGHAGEN, MINNESOTA'S OLDEST LIVING LUTHERAN." There's a picture of an extremely old woman smiling and waving.
- ELDERLY COUPLE looks in the passenger window of crew van. [Music under.]

ELDERLY MAN
Oh, yah-sure, Freda, yah. She was the oldest livin' Lutheran. Now she's dead as a doornail. It's them damn Shriners who ain't taken that Goddamn sign down yet - those lazy sons-a-bitches...

(more)

ELDERLY MAN (CONT)
I tells 'em, I tells 'em every fuckin' year, "Take the Goddamn Freda sign down, you lazy sons-a-bitches..."

SUPER: MAYOR OF MOUNT ROSE

- [Music up.] SHOT FROM CREW VAN. SUN is SETTING behind a lovely FIELD OF GREEN. A JOHN DEERE THRESHER travels ACROSS the burning red HORIZON. The DRIVER looks to be TAMMY CURRY, wearing the same, distinctive letter jacket. She appears to WAVE to us when, KABLOOM!!! The THRESHER BLOWS UP!

CUT TO:

CLOSE ON FRAMED SCHOOL PHOTO of TAMMY CURRY. PULL BACK to see her LETTER JACKET - SCORCHED and TORN - and FLOWERS. CONTINUE TO PULL BACK to reveal both are surrounded by buns, bars and coffee on a LONG BUFFET TABLE. We're:

INT. LUTHERAN CHURCH BASEMENT - KITCHEN AREA

A line of SOMBER and REPRESSED LUTHERANS help themselves to the food. Servettes stand at the ready. GLADYS and IRIS face CAMERA.

GLADYS
... Yah-sure she was young --

IRIS
Always hate to see the young ones called home --

GLADYS
Sometimes it's hard to understand God's great plan... But, the show must go on. I gotta ask Ted if we can use his barn light as a spot again. Watch the Jello salad, Iris?

Gladys rushes off to another part of the basement.

IRIS
She's so overworked, poor girl. I told her to take tonight off -- me-n-the girls could serve this one alone, but she said, "Iris, I took an oath --"

JUMP CUT TO:

IRIS
(hand over heart)
..."To bake and to serve, be it weddings or funerals, whenever called upon. So sayeth the Lord, so do-eth the Civil Servette." Excuse me -- Enid? Are you watchin' the Confetti Rice Salad or not?

A Servette quickly removes an almost empty bowl and takes it into the kitchen.

IRIS (CONT)
Somethin's weird this year - we can't seem to find judges. I called the whole Lutheran Prayer Chain today, but nobody wanted to do it.

Gladys rushes up with a look of absolute terror.

GLADYS
Iris! We're outta funeral buns!

IRIS
Oh my Lord above -- Wait! I saw a bag-a wedding buns in the pantry!

GLADYS
We can't serve wedding buns at a funeral --

JUMP CUT TO:

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - LIBRARY

IONA HILDEBRANDT
... Your funeral bun never exceeds two-n-a-half inches. It's greased on one side with butter or lard and filled with a ham-n-pickle spread... Your wedding bun is much larger, three and a half to four inches and it's filled with a piece of meat - sometimes turkey. Always use real butter on your wedding bun.

JUMP CUT TO:

IONA HILDEBRANDT
Why? Why do you put potato chips on top a tuna hotdish? How the hell should I know. One thing's for sure - if you're in a church basement, there better be buns or bars.

CUT TO:

INT. CAFE

SHOT AT COUNTER. CATHY, a large waitress, serves the crew.

CATHY
Yah-sure, I competed. I was seventeen - what the hell else was I gonna do? Stuffed nine hard boiled eggs in my mouth, then played Schubert's "Impromptu in E flat major" on the fiddle. Never had a lesson in my life.
(turning to crew guy)
You want butter on your donut or on the side?

CUT TO:

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - GYM

Same scene in bleachers.

GLADYS
... Swimsuit portion? No-siree-bob. The Junior Miss America Pageant is not a peep show. We judge on wholesome standards.

IRIS
Our girls are all corn fed and ham spanked.

GLADYS
Amen to that, Iris.
(to camera)
Now, I know what you're thinkin', you're thinkin', "Gladys, how do you judge wholesome standards?" Well, the answer is... very carefully.

Civil Servettes LAUGH.

IRIS
Ya gotta watch out for Gladys, she's a quick one.

JUMP CUT TO:

GLADYS
... Actually, the girls have been judged in only four categories since 1982, when we followed National's lead and dropped "party plannin'" and "sewin'" - not that they can't still be used for a girl's "talent."

CUT TO:

CLOSE ON AMBER CONROY

SUPER: CONTESTANT #1, AMBER CONROY

AMBER
Yah-my talent? I'll be tap dancin'.

Amber starts to TAP. PULL BACK to REVEAL, we're:

INT. FUNERAL HOME - EMBALMING ROOM

Amber TAPS AROUND a DEAD OLD MAN on the embalming slab.

AMBER (CONT)
I'm lucky I have an after-school job where I can practice my talent.

JUMP CUT TO:

AMBER
... Oh God, no! I just do the hair and make-up on the deceased...

Amber "shuffles off to Buffalo" to get some blusher. CREW GUYS are caught in the shot as Amber moves around quickly.

AMBER (CONT)
I've been doin' it for about three years now.

She does an elaborate "kick-ball-change" back to the deceased.

AMBER (CONT)
Some say I've got a real gift for makin' folks look like they're just nappin'.

She flashes a modest smile - we love her. PAN OVER to CLOSE UP of DEAD MAN'S FACE.

MATCH CUT TO:

CLOSE ON MICHELLE JOHANSON'S FACE

MICHELLE
... Yah-I'll be performing a dramatic monologue.

PULL BACK to reveal we're:

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - GYM - STAGE

SUPER: CONTESTANT #2, MICHELLE JOHANSON

MICHELLE (CONT)
Right now, I'm thinkin' "Othello" or... "Soylent Green." Lots of girls make a smooth transition from pageants into actin', y'know.

SMASH CUT TO:

LOCAL TV COMMERCIAL (VIDEO)

CONNIE, mid-30's, Midwestern attractive, wearing a sash and tiara, stands in front of a BLUE SCREEN of a FOREST.

CONNIE
Competin' for the title of Minnesota's Junior Miss America sure was excitin'. But, I never coulda won without my...

PULL BACK to reveal a table full of PORK PRODUCTS.

CONNIE (CONT)
St. Paul Pork Products!

SCREEN CHANGES to OUTSIDE FACTORY/STOCK YARDS. Connie now wears a coat and hat and acts as if it's chilly.

CONNIE (CONT)
I've been enjoyin' St. Paul Pork Products for years. I grew up right next to these stock yards.

SCREEN CHANGES to VIDEO of a SLAUGHTER LINE. PIG CARCASSES move on hooks. Connie wears a hard hat and blood stained butcher's apron. [Her shirt is the same color blue as the blue screen, so pig carcasses appear to move through her.]

CONNIE (CONT)
It's still the same family run business that Walter and Vera Polarski started in 1920 when they raised and slaughtered their first pig.

Connie grabs a HOT DOG from O.C. and takes a bite.

CONNIE (CONT)
Mmm-mmm. I just love St. Paul Pork Products. In fact, I love 'em so much--

SLIDE CHANGES to VIDEO OF THE SAUSAGE LINE. Workers stuff sausages. Connie wears a white jumpsuit and hairnet.

CONNIE (CONT)
I work here now!

PULL BACK from TV to reveal we're:

INT. "GERMAN SHEPHERD" BEDROOM

TESS WEINHAUS, wearing an "I Love German Shepherds" t-shirt, SHUTS OFF the TV. The room is filled with German Shepherd paraphernalia.

SUPER: CONTESTANT #3, TESS WEINHAUS

TESS
Uh... I don't know what my talent's gonna be yet....

A DACHSHUND enters and jumps on her lap.

TESS (CONT)
This is Kenny. Spike, my German Shepherd, went to live with a nice family on a farm after he attacked me. It wasn't his fault. I had beef jerky in my front pocket.
(pulling up shirt)
They re-made my belly with skin from my butt.

CUT TO:

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - GYM

Same scene in bleachers. BOYS' WRESTLING TEAM - tight singlets - enters for practice and starts running up and down the bleachers.

GLADYS
...Yah-then, for the "Judges Interview," each girl has a ten minute get-together with the judges before the pageant...

Gladys is DISTRACTED by the HARD, YOUNG BODIES. All are.

GLADYS (CONT)
Uh... Y'know, today's contestant, ah... Well, she... uh, has to know - oh good Lord, hello Tony. Hey to your folks --

A HUNKY WRESTLER nods.

GLADYS (CONT)
So... Ah, the... Well --

IRIS
Judges Interview.

GLADYS
Yes, the "Judges Interview"... Each girl has a ten minute get-together with the judges...

CUT TO:

EXT. "HAROLD'S HARDWARE HANK" - MAIN STREET

HAROLD - owner, late 40's - stands in front of this grubby little store front with his MILDLY RETARDED BROTHER, HANK, who SNIFFS and MUMBLES CONSTANTLY.

HAROLD
...Nope. Never judged nothin' afore --

SUPER: JUDGE #1, HAROLD VILMES

HANK
(pointing at camera)
Are we on "Cops?" Are we on "Cops?" Are we on "Cops?"

HAROLD
Shut up, Hank. This here's business.

Harold CUFFS Hank.

HANK
Ow, Harold - Mom said not the head.

HAROLD
Well, mom's dead, so shut your fly trap.

HANK
I will if you shut your pie hole.

HAROLD
Don't make me kick-ya where the good Lord split-ya.

Harold raises his hand, Hank FLINCHES and runs IN THE STORE.

HAROLD (CONT)
Sorry 'bout my brother. He's teched in the head. Don't know his left from his right, 'cept he wipes with one and eats with the other.

JUMP CUT TO:

HAROLD
Nah, I don't know why Mrs. Leeman asked me to judge this year. Lived here all my life. Never been asked afore.

JUMP CUT TO:

THROUGH THE STORE WINDOW we see Hank APPROACH, SPRAYING PAINT in a paper bag. He stops, STICKS HIS FACE IN and TAKES A DEEP BREATH -- he SMILES, paint covering his mouth and nose. He appears to get AGITATED.

HAROLD
...Oh-you-betcha! We're happier than the day Hanky got acquitted. I get made a judge, then the furniture store hires us to paint the whole damn thing.
(removing cap)
We're gonna use the money to get our mamma a proper headstone... Oh, and move her out to the cemetery.

SUDDENLY, Hank RUNS FULL SPEED into the WINDOW - BAM!!! He falls to the ground inside.

CUT TO:

EXT. DRUGSTORE - MAIN STREET

JOHN DOUGH - pharmacist, 30-ish, thin, nervous - chain smokes outside the drugstore.

SUPER: JUDGE #2, JOHN DOUGH

JOHN
Nope. No. Uh-uh. Never judged a pageant before in my life. Nope. No way. Never around young girls. Even if I was, why would I wanna be - y'know? I-I-I don't get off on that kinda thing and that's really why you're askin', right? S-Someone say somethin'?

CUT TO:

INT. LEEMAN STATION WAGON - AFTERNOON

Civil Servettes and crew are piled in. Gladys drives.

GLADYS
...Today's "To Do" list includes a trip to the Mall of America. We need outfits for the "Physical Fitness" number --

IRIS
Nothin' too showy!

GLADYS
Y'betcha, Iris. We still need a third judge and we need to think of a theme - Dove Bar to the lucky gal who gets it...

Servettes react with pleasure.

IRIS
Gladys -- Gladys! Look out!

CAR SWERVES.

GLADYS
Oh, my!
(waving out window)
Hello, Father Donigan! Sidewalks, sidewalks --
(back to camera)
Someone's gonna shave a piece offa his little rump roast - walkin' around the streets like that.

Iris MIMES DRINKING, "Glug, glug."

GLADYS (CONT)
Iris, stop!
(to camera)
It's not his fault. The communal wine just proves too temptin' for some of them. That's why we Lutherans use grape Koolaid for the blood of Christ. Don't get me wrong, I don't blame the Catholics for their natural love of the grape. Our choreographer is a Catholic...

CUT TO:

EST. SHOT - OLD TWO STORY HOUSE

SIGN painted on GARAGE DOOR: "DANCE STUDIO, DOWNSTAIRS PAST THE LAUNDRY ROOM."

INT. HOUSE - STAIRWAY TO BASEMENT

CAMERA MOVES DOWNSTAIRS to converted basement. LISA SWENSON and two other LARGE "BALLERINAS" practice at a 2x4/ballet barre. MOZART plays in the b.g. CHLORIS KLINGHAGEN watches and smokes. [Picture Betty Davis in her final days.]

CHLORIS KLINGHAGEN
Suck in the belly, Swenson.

SUPER: CHLORIS KLINGHAGEN, CHOREOGRAPHER

CUT TO:

Chloris smokes and talks to camera. "Ballerinas" practice.

CHLORIS KLINGHAGEN
...Oh God, close to forty years. Yah-one thing I learned - keep the dances simple, y'know? It's all some of these big girls can handle.

BALLET BARRE falls. CRASH!

CHLORIS KLINGHAGEN (CONT)
(without looking back)
The beam's for balance, Swenson, not for restin' your big ass.

"Ballerinas" replace barre.

CHLORIS KLINGHAGEN (CONT)
You met Amber Conroy yet? She was one of mine. God-given talent, amazin' tapper. Got a good heart in her, too. Not like some her age... Suck in the belly, Swenson...

CUT TO:

INT. DAKOTA COUNTY EATING DISORDERS CLINIC - MARY'S ROOM

Amber fixes Mary's hair, carefully brushing her balding head. Mary smiles, oblivious.

MARY
(labored breaths)
...Amber does my hair... once a week.

AMBER
(flattered and embarrassed)
Well... it's the least I can do for the reigning Mount Rose Junior Miss Amer--

Amber pulls the brush away with a CLUMP OF MARY'S HAIR dangling from it.

AMBER (CONT)
Oh God...

MARY
What?

AMBER
Huh? Oh... Uh, just a little snarl...

Amber mouths, "SHHH! DON'T TELL!" to camera as she tries to pull the clump of hair from the brush.

JUMP CUT TO:

Amber ties the TIARA and MISSING CLUMP OF HAIR to Mary's head with a ribbon.

AMBER
There we go.

She holds the mirror for Mary.

MARY
(delusional)
Beautiful... Maybe next week... a perm.

AMBER
Yah... sure...

Amber gives a kind, but worried smile to camera. Suddenly, BECKY LEEMAN enters with a large box of chocolates. She's fully aware of the cameras from the moment she enters.

BECKY
Helloooo, Little Mary Sunshine!
(pretending to notice camera)
What?! Oh-Oh my God! Lights, camera - and me without a stitch of make-up on. What are yous guys doin' here?

She's in full make-up.

AMBER
What're you doin' here?

BECKY
Oh, Amber, like you're the only one who visits Mary.

MARY
(to Becky)
Who are you?

BECKY
(covering)
"Who are you?!" Oh Mary, you kill me.
(to camera)
She always says that - it's a little game we play. Every week - same dippy little look on her face - "Who are you - who are you?" Just like that.
(more)

BECKY (CONT)
(in Mary's face)
It's me - Becky - and I brought your favorites.

Becky puts the chocolates on Mary's lap, a few spill. Throughout the following, Mary slowly reaches for them as if they're forbidden fruit and she's a very hungry Eve.

AMBER
Real nice, Becky, she's anorexic.

Becky roughly puts her HANDS OVER MARY'S EARS, who's now GENTLY PETTING the SPILLED CHOCOLATES in her lap.

BECKY
(sotto, reprimanding tone)
She's skinny, not deaf, Amber. All my good friend Mary needs is to put a little meat on her bones.

Becky takes her HANDS OFF MARY'S EARS.

BECKY (CONT)
(in Mary's face)
Eat up, Mary -- but not all at once. Don't wanna get chubby again - especially right before the pageant.

A look of absolute horror crosses Mary's face.

MARY
Am I chubby, Amber?... Am I?

Amber glares at Becky.

CUT TO:

INT. CHLORIS KLINGHAGEN'S BASEMENT - STUDIO

Fat "Ballerinas" and Lisa Swenson now practice spins.

CHLORIS
...Yah-yous boys sure picked a good year. If I was a bettin' woman and there was a line on this in Vegas, I'd lay down ten to one that it all comes down to Amber Conroy and Becky Leeman.
(long drag on cigarette)
Sweet Jesus, what a showdown this should be. If Cain and Abel had sisters...

Lisa SPINS OUT OF CONTROL, taking out the SOUND GUY.

CUT TO:

INT. GUN RANGE

BECKY - in shooting glasses and ear muffs - FIRES a Glock-17 9mm pistol with both hands. Sign on wall reads: "LUTHERAN SISTERHOOD GUN CLUB."

BECKY
(yelling over noise)
...What?! Klinghagen thinks it'll all come down to me and Amber?

Becky STOPS FIRING and takes off her ear muffs.

BECKY (CONT)
Well, you have to take everything Mrs. Klinghagen says with a grain of salt. Not all your Catholics go to communion for the wafers, if you know what I mean...

JUMP CUT TO:

Becky thumbs bullets into her magazine as she talks.

BECKY
... Yah-my mom gave me this gun for my thirteenth birthday... I'll always remember what she wrote in the card... "Jesus loves winners." That's why, no matter what I do...

She shoves the magazine back in her pistol.

BECKY (CONT)
I aim to win.

She smiles to camera, then VIOLENTLY FIRES OFF A FEW ROUNDS. ZOOM IN ON TARGET with a huge hole in the head.

CUT TO:

EXT. MALL OF AMERICA

In the vast, ALREADY FULL parking lot, we see GLADYS LEEMAN'S STATION WAGON searching for a parking spot.

GLADYS (V.O.)
You'd think they'd build the Parking Lot of America to go with the Mall of America!

INT. LEEMAN STATION WAGON - MALL OF AMERICA PARKING LOT

A FRUSTRATED GLADYS drives around, looking for a space.

IRIS
Oh, oh, I thought of a theme -- The Junior Miss America Rap...
(off blank stares)
'Cause the kids... they love their rap.

GLADYS
Yah, in the big city, maybe. They also love pornography and piercin' their genitalia. I don't think we wanna go promotin' that, now, do we.

IRIS
No.

CUT TO:

Car is parked in a HANDICAPPED SPOT --

IRIS
It's a five hundred dollar fine!

GLADYS
I said I'd move if a cripple came. Now just run in and pick out the outfits --

Iris and another servette start to get out of the car.

GLADYS (CONT)
Oh, wait! I just thought of the theme --

Iris and the servette stop.

GLADYS (CONT)
"Proud... to be... an... American."

Servettes react with pleasure.

JUMP CUT TO:

GLADYS
(to camera)
Last year? It was, "Buy American."

JUMP CUT TO:

GLADYS
..."U.S.A. is A-Okay."

JUMP CUT TO:

GLADYS
"Can I? I'm Amer-I-CAN!"

JUMP CUT TO:

Iris and the servette are gone.

GLADYS
Oh yah-sure, every pageant is special. But this year is extra super special for me... Seventeen years ago, yah-seventeen, I was crowned Mount Rose Junior Miss America.

CUT TO:

INT. CAFE

Cathy holds big plates of white food.

CATHY
... That's right. Gladys Leeman won my year for sewing plaid culottes. Goddamn plaid culottes...
(walking away)
Plaid fuckin' culottes...

CUT TO:

INT. CAR - CONTINUOUS

GLADYS
... And this year? Drum roll please... My lovely daughter, Rebecca Ann Leeman, is competin'.

A NEARBY CAR starts BEEPING it's HORN REPEATEDLY...

GLADYS (CONT)
What more could a mother want? I'm so doggone proud I could just spit.

Having had enough, Gladys angrily leans out her window --

GLADYS (CONT)
(yelling)
Hey! Hold onto your pants --

HORN STOPS. A CAR DOOR OPENS AND CLOSES. A look of terror sweeps across Gladys, who immediately gets back in and STARTS THE CAR.

GLADYS (CONT)
How was I s'posed to know he had no legs -- Well, that's the big city for-ya.

CUT TO:

INT. DAKOTA COUNTY EATING DISORDERS CLINIC - MARY'S ROOM

A NURSE now stands beside Mary.

MARY
With two weeks until the pageant... (continued labored breaths) I was practicing my talent... finishing my costume... brushing up on current events... and running eighteen miles a day on about four hundred calories... I was ready.

The NURSE gives her a hit of oxygen. Mary smiles and gives a THUMBS-UP from behind the oxygen mask.

CUT TO:

REHEARSAL MONTAGE BEGINS over MUSIC.

- EXT. CHLORIS KLINGHAGEN HOUSE - GARAGE DOOR. Contestants run out the SIDE DOOR as if running on stage. TESS WEINHAUS trips and falls, causing a CHAIN REACTION.
- GARAGE DOOR. Now contestants run out carrying SMALL WOODEN STEP LADDERS. As they reach the CHORUS LINE, they set the ladder down and LEAP FROG OVER. TESS WEINHAUS runs out, sets her ladder down, JUMPS and HITS MID-CROTCH. SHE THEN SLIDES PAINFULLY DOWN TO THE GROUND.
- FRONT LAWN. PAN DOWN row doing a seated CHORUS LINE on ladders. Most SUCK. Amber and Becky look great. Tess sits on the grass with a bag of ice on her crotch.
- FRONT LAWN. Girls perform a dance wearing partially constructed U.S. MONUMENT HEADDRESSES.

CUT TO:

CLOSE ON LESLIE MILLER - wearing her partial MONUMENT HEADDRESS. In the b.g. rehearsal continues.

LESLIE
Ready?... Okay, for my talent, uh --

TWO FOOTBALL PLAYERS interrupt - PAT, her boyfriend, and BRETT, who smiles and gives a nod to Amber. Pat GRABS Leslie and KISSES HER HARD.

LESLIE (CONT)
Uh Pat, I'm talkin' about my... Oh...

Hormones take over and they lock lips again. She wraps her legs around him. He FEELS-UP HER ASS. They continue groping as her Washington Monument slips off.

SUPER: CONTESTANT #4, LESLIE MILLER

FADE OUT:

WHITE LETTERS ON BLACK: THE FINAL WEEK

FADE IN:

CLOSE ON artist's rendering of FULLY DECORATED GYM: FLAGS drape the stage, a HUGE 3-D FLAG FLOATS overhead, FOOT LIGHTS, GIANT STATUE OF LIBERTY and DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE. HANDS ENTER FRAME, lift drawing. PULL BACK. JANITOR holds drawing, smiles and gives a thumbs up.

PAN AROUND. Gym looks NOTHING LIKE THE DRAWING - just a bunch of red, white and blue crepe paper.

CUT TO:

INT. MOLLY HOWARD'S LIVING ROOM

MOLLY HOWARD, a large white girl, sits between a JAPANESE COUPLE, Mr. and Mrs. Howard.

SUPER: CONTESTANT #5, MOLLY HOWARD

MR. HOWARD
(heavy accent)
.:. So we adopt Molly three year ago, when we come to America, to help acclimate us to American.

MOLLY
(smiling)
To America... Dad.

Mr. Howard laughs.

MRS. HOWARD
She all American girl. She our Junior Miss America girl.

MOLLY
Oh, Mom...

The Howard's biological daughter (they renamed her "TINA") enters frame. Although she's the picture of beauty, grace, talent and charm, she represents their old life.

TINA
(IN JAPANESE) Excuse me, Father, Mother, could I have a moment of your time?

MR. HOWARD
(turning, suddenly angry)
English! English, you stupid little retard! We America now, Tina!

TINA
(perfect English)
I'm sorry, Dad, but with all due respect, my name is Seiko.

MR. HOWARD
Tina!-Tina!!-TINA!!!

MRS. HOWARD
"Robert," settle down.

TINA
Well, when you guys have a second, I just finished the third movement of that concerto I was working on, if you'd like to hear it?

MR. HOWARD
No! We <u>not</u> like to hear it! Go to your room and shut up.

TINA
Oh, I almost forgot...
(removing envelope from pocket)
I got my acceptance to Stanford.

MR. HOWARD
What, you deaf? I say, shut up-shut up-SHUT UP!!!

Tina rolls her eyes and exits.

MR. HOWARD (CONT)
Cut her outta this... Now Molly, tell movie man what <u>you</u> talent do.

MOLLY
I'll be line dancin'.

ASIAN MAN
(giving thumbs up)
Country western!

ASIAN WOMAN
Clint Black! Ruff!

ASIAN MAN
Hey, what he got, I not got?

They ALL LAUGH.

CUT TO:

INT. "NEW YORK, NEW YORK" BEDROOM

It's all NEW YORK MEMORABILIA. LISA SWENSON - big bubbly girl - sits on her bed.

LISA
I'm gonna sing and dance to, "New York, New York."

SUPER: CONTESTANT #6, LISA SWENSON

LISA (CONT)
See, I fell in love with The Big Apple last summer when I was visitin' my brother. He followed his dream to New York.

PICKS UP 8x10's, shows to camera.

LISA (CONT)
This is Peter as Liza. This is him as Madonna. Oh, here's me with him as Barbara...

CUT TO:

EXT. TRAILER - LATE AFTERNOON

After a BEAT... Amber TAPS HER WAY around the trailer, HOME FROM SCHOOL - backpack, Walkman, cool MUSIC BLARING.

INT. TRAILER - AMBER'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Amber stands in a room the SIZE OF A CLOSET. Posters, articles and pictures of great tap dancers and Diane Sawyer cover the walls.

AMBER
... Dreams? Yah-sure I got 'em... Sometimes I dream of winnin'... I dream of gettin' outta Mount Rose and bein' a super great reporter like Diane Sawyer. I mean, guys get outta Mount Rose all the time for hockey scholarships or prison. But the pageant's kinda my only chance.

JUMP CUT TO:

Amber points to LARGE PAGEANT PHOTO OF DIANE SAWYER - 1963.

AMBER
... Yah-1963. Her beauty worked against her when she started as a reporter in Louisville, her hometown. Those were different times.

JUMP CUT TO:

ANNETTE CONROY, Amber's mom - sexy, but tired - finishes teasing and back-combing Amber's hair, then SPRAYS HAIRSPRAY for a couple seconds. Amber holds a letter over her face as the CLOUD GROWS.

AMBER
Thanks, Mom...
(coughing)
It's fine, really.

ANNETTE
(whispering)
You call me if that starts to fall, Sweetie -- .

Annette runs out of the shot.

AMBER
(reading the letter)
"Dear Ms. Conroy... Thank you for your letter dated September sixth, 1994 --"
(to camera)
That attention to detail is very Diane.
(back to letter)
"Best of luck in all you do. Dictated, but not read, D. Sawyer."

SUDDENLY, the trailer TIPS TO ONE SIDE. CREW FALLS THROUGH SHOT, AD-LIBBING, "Shit! Earthquake! Get in a doorway!" etc. Amber sits calmly at an angle.

AMBER (CONT)
Relax, yous guys. It's Mrs. Petrilla...

ROUGH HAND-HELD - THROUGH TRAILER WINDOW

MRS. PETRILLA, 400-plus pounds, pulls herself into the trailer, causing it to tilt. Annette holds on.

AMBER (V.O.)
... Reminds me of another dream I have...

BACK IN AMBER'S ROOM

Trailer SLAMS DOWN LEVEL again.

AMBER
... to live in a house without wheels.

CUT TO:

EST. SHOT - LEEMAN FAMILY HOME - NIGHT

Landscaped grounds surround this LOVELY TWO-STORY.

LESTER LEEMAN (V.O.)
...You betcha. S'posed to be colder-n-a witches tit tonight...

INT. LEEMAN HOME - LIVING ROOM

It looks like a Levitz showroom - proof you can't buy taste. Gladys sits stiffly between Becky and her husband, LESTER - mid-60's, gruff, "old school" salesman, drink in hand.

GLADYS
(nervous laugh)
Oh, Lester. He loves his weather, y'know.

LESTER
(looking to crew o.c.)
Hey, ya like it? Open it... Yah-the globe. Pull at the equator there.

GLADYS
We're not in the showroom, Dear.

BANGING and FUMBLING. A CORKSCREW flies into shot - CREW GUY quickly ENTERS SHOT and grabs it.

LESTER
Fits three full-size booze bottles. The casette deck pulls outta Afghanistan, there.

BECKY
(embarrassed)
Mommm.

GLADYS
Lester?

LESTER
Oh, all right.
(to camera)
How soon they forget where all this comes from.

BECKY
Japan.

LESTER
That's enough, young lady.

JUMP CUT TO:

GLADYS
"Impartial?" Outside this house I'm Gladys Leeman, President, Civil Servettes - impartial as the day is long. But we're inside my home now and I've gotta warn you, I'm wearin' my "wife apron" and "mom hat." So, I can safely say that I'm the mother of the most talented contestant Mount Rose has ever seen.

JUMP CUT TO:

Lester's gone from the couch.

GLADYS
I'll field that one - Rebecca's saving her voice.

Becky smiles admiringly at Gladys.

GLADYS (CONT)
You-betcha, Rebecca's ready. She's been singin' and dancin' since she was knee high to a pig's eye.

Lester returns to the couch, large drink in hand.

LESTER
Yah-she's damn near as good as that little black fella - with the glass eye - y'know, the Jew.

GLADYS
Sammy Davis Junior, Honey.

BECKY
Nice one, Dad. He's dead.

CUT TO:

INT. BETZ LIVING ROOM

MRS. BETZ, a large woman, holds a tray of bars. CREW MEMBERS reach IN THE SHOT and help themselves. JANELLE BETZ sits on the couch, SIGNING EVERYTHING SHE SAYS.

SUPER: CONTESTANT #8, JANELLE BETZ

JANELLE
(slow, due to signing)
...My talent will be an interpretive dance while I sign, "Through the Eyes of Love." I have a dream of spreadin' sign language around the world... Mom? Would you be so kind?

Mrs. Betz quickly puts down the bars and goes to the piano where she starts "Through the Eyes of Love." Janelle begins to gesticulate and sign the words in an overly dramatic performance that looks like a bizarre seizure. SOUND occasionally DIPS OUT as the BOOM OPERATOR reaches for bars.

CUT TO:

INT. DAKOTA COUNTY EATING DISORDERS CLINIC - MARY'S ROOM

Mary, now with oxygen tubes in her nose and her tiara still tied to her head with a ribbon, is crocheting a hot pad. Others are scattered on her bed.

MARY
These? I wanted to do something special... something me... to wish each contestant luck... So, I crocheted hot pads...
(holding up hot pad)
Each one says... "Food is good for you... Food is your friend."

CUT TO:

EXTREME BLURRY CLOSE UP - CREW GUY WORKS ON THE CAMERA LENSE. The crew is packing up to leave.

MARY
Have yous guys seen Amber today?

Documentarian mumbles, "Uh-uh."

MARY (CONT)
She was s'posed to come by for my perm... She's never missed a hair appointment... Hope she's okay...

JUMP CUT TO:

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - MAIN OFFICES - NEXT DAY

DIZZY OLD SECRETARY looks through a filing cabinet. BANNER on wall reads: "MUSKIE PRIDE AT MOUNT ROSE HIGH." A muscular Muskie gives a thumbs-up.

SECRETARY
... Oh, yah-yah-yah... Amber's class... I'm lookin'...
(looking through files)
So... Yous boys are from Hollywood, eh? My daughter's out there. Oh God, if you ever run into her, have her give me a call, would ya? Last I heard, she goes by "Vanilla Cream." My name's not "Cream," it's Johnson...

JUMP CUT TO:

SECRETARY
My-oh-my, this year's pageant takes me back. Amber and Becky... Same thing with their moms, y'know... Hated each other. Like a coupla mad hens, those two. Annette beat Gladys at everything - which just made it worse - cheerleading, student council, gun club...

CUT TO:

OLD HOME MOVIE FOOTAGE - HIGH SCHOOL GYM - 1978

PAGEANT NIGHT. '70's MUSIC PLAYS. Shot by Gladys' DAD, her MOM'S HAND is ALWAYS IN FRAME, holding a Kleenex, giving directions. He PANS ACROSS a LINE of four CONTESTANTS, including CATHY, at 17. [Feathered hair and polyester.]

GLADYS AS HER MOM (O.C.)
(whispering and pointing)
Oh for Christsake, Herman, get a shot of the line - the line - across the line there, then...

A 17 YEAR-OLD GLADYS walks on stage to join them.

GLADYS AS HER MOM (O.C. CONT)
(whispering and pointing)
Oh-oh, there she is. Will you lookey at our little Gladys? Isn't she an angel... Hi Honey...

MOM'S HAND WAVES. Gladys waves back.

GLADYS AS HER MOM (O.C. CONT)
Our little angel-face... Cute as a bug's ear, our Glady...

CAMERA PANS off stage to a YOUNGER LESTER, who's blowing into a 17 YEAR-OLD ANNETTE'S EAR. Camera begins a <u>SLOW, SHAKY ZOOM IN ON HER YOUNG PERKY BREASTS</u>.

GLADYS AS HER MOM (O.C. CONT)
Not like that Conroy girl. Did you see the dress on her? It just screams, "I'm loose as a long necked goose..."

CUT TO:

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - MAIN OFFICES

SECRETARY
... Sure Gladys won, but good Lord, even the kids on the short bus could figure that one out...

CUT TO:

INT. CAFE

Cathy is serving LARGE PLATES OF FOOD.

CATHY
...The judges my year were Father Donigan, Mr. Root and Lester Leeman... Good Lord, Donigan had it out for me. I caught him drinkin' during confession and told Sister Fist - well, that wasn't her real name. Rumor had it she shoved her entire fist down some kid's throat for talkin'.

SUPER: THE MOUNT ROSE CATHOLIC CHURCH ACTIVELY AND VEHEMENTLY DENIES THESE ALLEGATIONS.

CATHY (CONT)
Yous boys want your butter on your hotdish or on the side?

CUT TO:

INT. LEEMAN FURNITURE SHOWROOM

FOLLOW LESTER around CHEESY ROOM DISPLAYS. JEAN KANGAS, his meek, middle-age secretary follows him everywhere. Lester CALLS OUT to a YOUNG COUPLE sitting in a dining room.

LESTER (CONT)
Hey Tim, Carla - if yous kids don't try to Jew me down none, I'll throw in a matchin' hutch.

The COUPLE smiles excitedly.

LESTER (CONT)
(to camera)
See, that there's my specialty. Don't pay me less and I'll give ya more.
(sotto)
Secret is, the hutch is included in the price. Ain't that right, Jean?

Lester SMACKS Jean on the ass.

CUT TO:

Lester sits on a 70's style sectional. He looks uncomfortable with the question and GETS UP TO EXIT.

LESTER
... Uh, yah-I met Gladys around the time she was competin'...

CUT TO:

Lester sits in an "Early American" living room.

LESTER
... No, uh, Gladys couldn't go on to compete at State 'cause of a, y'know, a thyroid condition.

HAROLD (O.C.)
Hey Mr. Leeman!

Lester turns, nervous. CAMERA PANS OVER to see HAROLD and HANK approaching, wearing PAINT COVERED OVERALLS. Hank seeing camera, starts to SING "Bad boys, bad boys..." He scratches throughout.

LESTER (O.C.)
Say, yous boys ever seen a "titty bar?" Well, I'm guessin' you ain't seen one like this -- C'mon, follow me --

HAROLD
Yah-Lester, wait-up! We can't keep paintin' 'less we get some bug spray. Those 'squitos is goin' after Hanky like hobos on a Twinkie.

CUT TO:

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - MAIN OFFICES

Dizzy old secretary still holds out the file.

SECRETARY
... Yah-well, my dog, Mitzi, had the same kinda "thyroid condition" Gladys had and wound up with six pups.
(opening file)
Here we go... Right now Amber's workin' in the cafeteria. Just go out that door and follow the smell of lutefisk and lefsa.

CUT TO:

INT. HIGH SCHOOL LIBRARY

[Same scene as "funeral bun" explanation.]

IONA HILDEBRANDT
Lutefisk is Cod Fish that's been salted and soaked in lye for a week or so. Lefsa's just really flat bread. Both are best with lots-a butter.

CUT TO:

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - KITCHEN

MOVE through kitchen. LUNCH LADIES haul, serve and prepare food. PAN OVER to AMBER, who's unhappily scraping and spraying lunch trays as they're dropped off at her window. BECKY, flirting her ass off, comes to the window with BRETT, HANDSOME FOOTBALL PLAYER we saw before. Both carry trays.

BECKY
...Yah-well, maybe Friday, then. A bunch of us were gonna go cow-tippin' --

BRETT
(seeing Amber)
Uh, I-uh-I'm kinda busy Friday.

Amber looks up to see Brett looking at her. He smiles. She smiles. You can feel the attraction. Amber becomes girlishly self-conscious -- adjusting her rubber apron and brushing hair out of her eyes with her big rubber gloves.

Becky notices their attraction and goes from flirt to uber-bitch in a heartbeat.

BECKY
Give her your tray, Brett. You're holdin' up the line.

Brett looks at Becky, then at Amber, not wanting to make her clean his tray.

BRETT
Uh...

BECKY
Give it to her!

AMBER
Here, I'll take it. It's my job.

BRETT
Nq...
(looking at Becky)
I-I'll do it.

He takes the sprayer from a surprised Amber and starts to clean off his own tray. Becky can't believe his defiance. She stews for a minute, then THROWS HER TRAY ON THE COUNTER - SPRAYING AMBER WITH FOOD as she STORMS OFF.

BRETT (CONT)
Oh man, you got lutefisk in your hair.

AMBER
Well, then it must be Wednesday.

Brett CHUCKLES and removes the offending leutefisk.

BRETT
So, uh, I-I'm not really busy Friday. I just said that - y'know --

AMBER
I know.

BRETT
So if, uh, you wanted to do somethin'...

AMBER
(shy)
Yah-sure. You betcha... Oh crap, I probably gotta work at the funeral home. We're real busy this time of year --

BEAT.

AMBER/BRETT
-- Huntin' season.

Shocked at the coincidence, they share a LAUGH.

BRETT
Well, uh, I'm cuttin' out early today to do a little duck huntin'... But, uh, maybe I could call you tonight?

AMBER
Yah-sure, fine... Fine...

BRETT
Okay... Well, bye.

AMBER
Bye...

Amber smiles, gives a shy little wave, turns and NOTICES THE CREW. She reacts, startled.

AMBER (CONT)
Oh, God --
(nervously looking around)
Uh... Yous guys shouldn't be in here...

DOCUMENTARIAN (O.C.)
It's okay. Doreen gave us hair nets.

AMBER
No, look...
(whispering as she exits)
I-I can't talk to yous guys here. Stop by my house tonight...

She looks around and rushes off.

CUT TO:

EST. SHOT - TRAILER PARK - EVENING

FROM THE CREW VAN we PASS THROUGH a plywood facade that looks like a CASTLE. CRAPPY TRAILER-HOMES line the road behind. [PATSY CLINE'S, "THERE HE GOES" PLAYS]

DOCUMENTARIAN (O.C.)
... Pete, man, could you turn the station? This music makes me wanna kill myself.

CREW GUY (O.C.)
It's on every station.

RADIO STATIC as someone tries to change it. PATSY <u>is</u> on every station.

CUT TO:

EXT./INT. CONROY TRAILER - MOMENTS LATER

SIGN on door reads: "ANNETTE'S HAIR SHACK." HAND KNOCKS. [PATSY CLINE is on the radio inside.]

ANNETTE (O.C.)
Yah-c'min quick before you let all the mosquitos in.

PUSH IN to a MINI HAIR SALON in the kitchen. Annette gives LORETTA - neighbor, mid-50's - a bouffant.

SUPER: HOME OF CONTESTANT #1, AMBER CONROY

ANNETTE
(surprised)
Oh - Jesus H. Christ!

LORETTA
Are we on "Cops?"

ANNETTE
(hitting Loretta's shoulder)
They're the boys makin' the movie 'bout the pageant. I told you all about 'em.

LORETTA
(to camera)
I tell Annette, I says, "You talk to me durin' 'Suddenly Susan,' you might as well be talkin' to the wall."

ANNETTE
(ignoring Loretta)
Amber got called in to the bone gardens tonight. You just missed her. She's in- a helluva mood today anyways.

LORETTA
Say, yous boys been to the Leeman's?

ANNETTE
Loretta, shut it.

LORETTA
Y'know, if you have, you got all the pictures of the winner you need.

ANNETTE
Shut it up, Loretta.

LORETTA
It's true.

JUMP CUT TO:

LORETTA
(drinking beer)
Let's just say who should win, who deserves to win is Amber.

ANNETTE
(mumbled to self)
Why don't you just put a big ol' target on your ass, Loretta --

LORETTA
She's the prettiest, y'know... The best damn tapper... The most smartest --

ANNETTE
"Most smartest?" Oh, that's good, Loretta. Make sure you get a picture of that. "Most smartest." We're cuttin' you off and sendin' you home.

Annette takes Loretta's beer, starts to push her out.

LORETTA
Well excuse me, Annette, but I'm braggin' up your kid, here.
(to crew)
Amber's gonna be the next Diane Sawyer, y'know...

JUMP CUT TO:

Loretta holds onto the door frame so Annette can't push her out.

LORETTA
(to Annette)
Ow! Don't pinch.
(to camera)
Why do I think Becky'll win? You're talkin' 'bout the richest family in a small town. It's front page news when one of 'em takes a shit.
(she laughs hard)
Can one of yous boys give me a ride home?

ANNETTE
Don't fall for it. She lives two trailers down.

CUT TO:

EST. SHOT - MORTUARY - EVENING

Old, converted three-story house. SIGN on lawn: "ROOT FUNERAL PARLOR."

INT. MORTUARY - ENTRY WAY

TAPED ORGAN MUSIC. MOURNERS everywhere - a busy place. GORDON ROOT - older, in simple black suit - ushers a FAMILY (3) out of the COFFIN SHOWROOM, shaking the DAD'S HAND.

MR. ROOT
... Yah-sure, my pleasure, Jim.

SUPER: GORDON ROOT, OWNER, ROOT FUNERAL PARLOR

MR. ROOT (CONT)
Just wish more people would buy for the family while they're livin'. Makes the end so much easier.

The LITTLE GIRL pulls at her MOTHER.

LITTLE GIRL
I want pink in mine, Mommy. I wanna change to pink!

Mr. Root gets down on one knee beside the little girl.

MR. ROOT
Look, Ashley, yous can change your mind a hundred times. I won't be orderin' yours 'til you stop growin'.

Little girl CHEERS - they start to exit.

LITTLE GIRL
Bury me like this! Bury me like this!

She crosses her arms over her chest and run out. Parents smile and follow. Mr. Root turns to the crew.

MR. ROOT
Yah-boys, if you're here about the drifter --

JUMP CUT TO:

MR. ROOT
Oh-yah-yah-yah, Amber said somethin' 'bout yous boys.
(pointing down hallway)
Just make it quick if you would. Huntin' season-n-all. Busy, busy, busy...

CUT TO:

LARGE DOOR: "EMBALMING, PLEASE KNOCK." HAND KNOCKS.

AMBER (O.C.)
Yah-I'm almost done!

PUSH INTO ROOM. Amber, back to us, frantically applies blusher to AN OLD WOMAN IN A COFFIN. Another BODY, COVERED WITH A WHITE SHEET, is on the embalming slab. The TOP and BRIM of a HUNTING CAP can be seen.

AMBER
Here, Mr. Root. Take her and go!

She turns around, sees crew.

AMBER (CONT)
(surprised)
Ahhh! Je-sus-Christ-on-a-cross!
(catching breath)
Look, number one rule in a funeral home - never sneak up on the livin'.

Amber turns to the slab to continue working. She PULLS OFF THE SHEET to REVEAL BRETT, handsome football player, still wearing his hunting plaid.

JUMP CUT TO:

AMBER
(covering real emotions)
Upset about Brett? Nah... hazard of the trade. I don't really have time for guys anyways... It's weird, though. He took it right between the eyes. Don't often see that.

CUT TO:

INT. GUN RANGE

Becky thumbs bullets into a 12gauge pump shotgun.

BECKY
(cool as a cucumber)
He did? Well, huntin's dangerous... So, anyways, my mom gave me this 12gauge for my sixteenth birthday...

CUT TO:

INT. EMBALMING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Amber wipes her eyes, when MR. ROOT BURSTS THROUGH THE DOOR.

MR. ROOT
I need Stella now! The family's steamin' like a cow pie in July - said she didn't look nothin' like the picture they gave you.

Amber turns from Brett and closes the coffin.

AMBER
Sorry. I just thought she might not wanna meet her Maker lookin' like a cheap whore.

MR. ROOT
Well, your "cheap whore" is this family's "lovin' mother."
(pointing to Brett)
The Clemens' said to make him look like he just came in from snowmobilin'. Pink cheeks --

AMBER
(starting to mist up)
-- red nose and ears. I know, I know.

Mr. Root PULLS STELLA'S COFFIN OUT.

CUT TO:

An obviously upset Amber puts make-up on Brett.

AMBER
I couldn't talk today 'cause... I'm scared, okay?
(deep breath)
I open my locker after first period and there's a picture of Tammy Curry taped inside.

JUMP CUT TO:

Amber holds up a snapshot of a SMILING GIRL ON A THRESHER.

AMBER
This was written on back.

She turns the picture over to reveal, "YOU'RE NEXT!"

CUT TO:

EXT. MOUNT ROSE - STREET

TWIN OFFICERS lean against their car. One prepares to pack some snuff.

TWIN OFFICER #1
Oh-yah, helluva way to go, there. After some extensive investigatin', we figure the Curry girl musta been drivin' and smokin' and KABLEWEY!

TWIN OFFICER #2
(holding a Skoal tin)
Not enough left of her to fill a tin.

He puts a pinch between his cheek and gum.

CUT TO:

INT. EMBALMING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

A visibly upset Amber still applies make-up to Brett.

AMBER
Yah-sure Tammy liked to drive her dad's thresher - she said the heavy vibration helped her think, y'know? But I know for a fact, she only smoked after a good drive. You ask me or anyone else who isn't scared to talk about it -- Tammy was murdered.
(holding back tears)
God, I bet Diane Sawyer never had to deal with crap like this...
(to crew guy)
Toss me "Caucasian #5," would ya?

A CREW GUY walks IN FRAME and hands her a make-up jar.

AMBER (CONT)
Man, I can't wait for fishin' season...

MR. ROOT BURSTS IN, white as a corpse.

MR. ROOT
Amber --

AMBER
No, don't say it. Another stray bullet to the head --

She adjusts Brett's red plaid hunting cap.

AMBER (CONT)
I'm gonna need more caps.

MR. ROOT
You hafta go home. There's some kinda emergency at the trailer park.

AMBER
Relax, that's my ma's code for, "Bring home milk and a carton-a Luckys."

MR. ROOT
No. Loretta called. There's been a... a fire.

AMBER
Oh my God - no! Is my mom okay? Was she home?

MR. ROOT
I-I don't know. Here...
(offering keys)
The Lutherans blocked your car in. Take the hearse.

She grabs the keys and RUNS OUT.

CUT TO:

INT. HEARSE - NIGHT

Amber drives fast and furious as we come to what's left of her trailer.

AMBER
(to self)
Damn... I quit... I quit! That's it...

Hearse SCREECHES to a halt. We hear a THUD, then MOANS from in back.

AMBER (CONT)
Sorry, yous guys, forgot we were loaded.

Amber jumps out. CAMERA FOLLOWS, a la "COPS." It's PANDEMONIUM with FIRE TRUCKS, NEIGHBORS, an AMBULANCE, etc.

AMBER (CONT)
Mom! Mom!? MOMMM!!

LORETTA runs up to Amber as TWO FIREMEN APPROACH.

FIREMAN #1
You family?

LORETTA
No, she's just screamin' "Mom, Mom!" for the hell of it. She's Annette's kid.

AMBER
(to Loretta)
Is Mom okay?

LORETTA
She's alive, Sweetie.

FIREMAN #1
(pointing to ambulance)
They're takin' her out to Farmington Memorial there, then.

CAMERA PANS OVER to see a semi-conscious ANNETTE as they load her stretcher into the ambulance, shut the doors and start to pull away. Amber runs after them.

AMBER
Mommmm! I'll be right behind you in the hearse - don't let that worry you!

CUT TO:

EST. SHOT - FARMINGTON MEMORIAL HOSPITAL - NIGHT

INT. HOSPITAL - HALLWAY

A sweet young CANDY STRIPER faces camera.

CANDY STRIPER
(perky, by rote)
Farmington Memorial was built over an ancient Chippewa burial sight. We have the largest arrowhead collection and the only Candy-Striper Training Program in the tri-state area... Mint?

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL - ANNETTE'S ROOM

A DOCTOR, Amber and Loretta stand beside Annette, who's got an I.V., bandages and her LEFT HAND IS WRAPPED AND ELEVATED.

DOCTOR
... Oh you betcha, this was a doozy. Right now, our chief concern is to stabilize Annette, then, in surgery, remove this here.

Removing BANDAGE to reveal BEER CAN, STILL HELD in her HAND.

ANNETTE
(weak)
I sit down for a beer and KA-BLEWEY! Somethin' blows through my kitchen window. Next thing I know, I'm ass up in Loretta's flower bed.

LORETTA
Like a giant fuckin' garden gnome, she was.

CUT TO:

EXT. TRAILER PARK - DUSK

SHAKY VIDEO of a 15 YEAR-OLD ROCKER KID from the NECK DOWN, holding a crappy electric guitar, outside a trailer. ANNETTE'S TRAILER is prominent in the b.g.

ROCKER KID #1
(Beavis with a MN accent)
Yah-dude, put another fuckin' book under it.

ROCKER KID #2 (O.C.)
Don't say "fuckin'." My ma's got the windows open.

CAMERA MOVES, then STEADIES. We see ALL OF ROCKER KID #1. ROCKER KID #2 runs into the shot with his guitar.

ROCKER KID #2
'Kay-dude, hurry. We gots like two fuckin' minutes left on the battery.

ROCKER KID #1
A one... two... one-two-three --

SUDDENLY Annette's trailer EXPLODES BEHIND THEM! ROCKER KIDS turn to see A BODY (Annette) FLYING THROUGH THE AIR.

ROCKER KIDS
FUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUCK!!!!

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL - ANNETTE'S ROOM

DOCTOR
(pointing to hand)
... You can see here, the sudden heat of the flames melted Annette's fingernails, which attached themselves to her fingers and the can.

ANNETTE
Fuckin' Lee Press-Ons.

INTERCOM (V.O.)
Paging Doctor Fransen.

DOCTOR
That's me.

INTERCOM (V.O.)
Yah-Mark, could you c'mon over to the E,R. pretty quick, then?

DOCTOR
Excuse me.
(exiting)
Boy-oh-boy... Huntin' season...

ANNETTE
(to Amber)
I shoved your tap shoes in my jeans before I was blown outta the house, Honey. Check with the guy who cut my pants off. He should have 'em.

AMBER
Mom, uh, about that... I... I'm - Oh God...

Amber STARTS TO CRY and RUNS OUT.

ANNETTE
Oh-Jesus-Mary-n-Joseph, she's pregnant!
(calling after)
If you are - come back, Sweetie... Mommy wants to talk, then KILL YOU!

LORETTA
(running after Amber)
Annette, why don't you just see if there's any beer left in that can and relax a bit...

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL - HALLWAY

Loretta and Amber face off.

LORETTA
You're what?!

AMBER
I-I'm quittin' the pageant.

LORETTA
I heard you, I was just tryin' to scare you into changin' your mind. Oh for Christsake, Amber, the woman clung to your tap shoes while flyin' through the air like a Goddamn lawn dart!

AMBER
Oh God, I'm dead...

A CANDY STRIPER approaches them.

CANDY STRIPER
Hey, lil' Miss Sad-pants and her friend Serious Sally, how 'bout some nice cool mints to turn those frowns upside-down... "s."

LORETTA
(to candy striper)
D'ya think a nice cool mint'd help if I shoved your head up your ass?

Fear sweeps over the Candy Striper - she BOLTS DOWN THE HALL! Loretta puts an arm around Amber and starts to walk down the opposite direction.

AMBER
So, what do I say?

LORETTA (CONT)
Simple. Just say, "Mom, I know you sacrificed everything -- relationships, dreams - your tummy, ass and thighs -- all to bring me into this world. All so I could have tap lessons and be in the pageant - the same one <u>you</u> were in. But, y'know what? I'm quittin." There. Easy as pie.

AMBER
Oh my God. I'm so dead...

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL - ANNETTE'S ROOM

FOLLOW Amber in past the now CRYING CANDY STRIPER.

ANNETTE
(throwing mints)
... Next one of you in here without a pack of Luckys in her hand, dies!

CANDY STRIPER
(through tears, picking up mints)
Yah-sure, and you have a super day, too.

AMBER
Mom, look, don't say anything. First of all, I'm not pregnant...

Amber sits on the bed. Annette GRABS HER SHIRT.

AMBER (CONT)
Mom!

ANNETTE
I ain't lettin' go 'til you tell me what's up. I'm reachin' a point where I'd kill someone for the nicotine on their fingernails.

AMBER
(deep breath)
Okay. Yesterday I... I got this picture... So I kinda, y'know, I'm thinkin'... No. I'm gonna... I-I-I'm gonna quit the pageant.

ANNETTE
What?!

She HITS AMBER with her BEER-CANNED HAND.

AMBER
Ow!

ANNETTE
(to camera)
Would yous boys excuse us a second? Loretta, you too.

JUMP CUT TO:

SHOT THROUGH THE DOOR. Amber paces around Annette's bed.

AMBER
... Nice mouth you got there, Mom, but I-I'm not goin' through this again.

ANNETTE
<u>You're</u> not goin' through this again? <u>You</u>? You're not the one who knows how Jiffy Pop feels.

AMBER
Oh, c'mon... First the picture of Tammy, then Brett Clemens, now this? It's scary.

ANNETTE
I'll give you "scary," Amber. Look at me. Do you wanna look like you been rode hard and put away wet when you're thirty-four? I'm a "lifer" here. Best I can hope for is to end up in a descent "raisin ranch" where they'll change me twice a day.

AMBER
That's it, I'm goin'...

ANNETTE
Amber, wait. I's watchin' Oprah last week and she asks Loretta Lynn if she got to live her life over, would she do anythin' different? And Ms. Lynn says, "no." "No!" I'm thinkin', "that lyin' bitch!" Everybody'd do somethin' different. Especially Loretta-fuckin'-Lynn -- we all saw, "Coal Miner's Daughter." God, if I got to do it over? I'd start walkin' outta this town the minute I took my first step. Practically the only thing I <u>wouldn't</u> do different is have you...

Amber sits on the bed.

AMBER
God I hope that's you and not your concussion talkin'.

ANNETTE
(smiling)
It's me... I just don't want this to be the thing you'd do over. This pageant's your ticket outta here. I know you can win, Amber.

AMBER
Wow... I never knew you even thought about me that much.

ANNETTE
Amber, you're like, like this Coors in my hand. You're a part of me. Honest to God, I'm always thinkin' about you... I'm thinkin', "What's she doin', who's she talkin' to, wonder if she's thinkin' about me..." Sometimes I think I'm thinkin' about you so hard, you might hear what I'm thinkin'.

AMBER
(touched)
... Yah?

ANNETTE
Yah.

AMBER
So you're that little voice inside my head goin', "don't ditch algebra, don't ditch algebra."

ANNETTE
Nah, I'm the one goin', "Pick up some smokes for your dear old mom on the way home... and none of that filter shit."

Amber LAUGHS.

ANNETTE (CONT)
C'mere... I love you much.

AMBER
I love you much.

Annette hugs Amber.

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL - HALLWAY

FOLLOW a jubilant Amber and Loretta.

LORETTA
Hell-no, she ain't quittin'.

AMBER
Mom said if I did, she'd look up my dad and marry him...

JUMP CUT TO:

AMBER
... No. She never hid the fact that my dad picked his career over us. What'd she used to say?

LORETTA
"Once a carnie, always a carnie."

AMBER
Oh-yah. Mom still cries when she sees a Tilt-a-Whirl or a fat lady in a tube top.

CUT TO:

EXT. MOUNT ROSE STREET - MORNING

The twin officers lean against their car.

TWIN OFFICER #1
... The Conroy fire? Foul play? Shit-no. After some thorough investigatin', we determined it musta been bad wirin'. Mosta them trailer-folk plug a TV, VCR, crock pot and Fry-Daddy into one outlet and don't think nothin' of it 'til -- KABLEWEY!

TWIN OFFICER #2
(taking a pinch of Skoal)
Not enough left to fill a tin.

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL - ANNETTE'S ROOM - DAY

Annette is in bad shape. The Candy Striper nervously stands beside her, holding a syringe.

ANNETTE
"Bad wirin'?!" Well, if that ain't the biggest crock-a-shit ever --
(turning on the candy striper)
Oooowwww-Jesus, did K-mart have a sale on dull needles?

CANDY STRIPER
I-I just need one more "do-over."

ANNETTE
Are you even s'posed to be doin' this?

CANDY STRIPER
(near tears)
It's huntin' season. We're short staffed.

She turns her head, closes her eyes and JAMS THE NEEDLE in Annette's arm. ANNETTE YELLS IN PAIN.

CANDY STRIPER (CONT)
(to crew as she exits)
She should be out in a second.
(suddenly looking at the syringe)
Gosh-I hope that was a sedative.

ANNETTE
Say, yous boys meet the Leeman's neighbors to the west - the Johnsons?
(beat)
Doesn't matter - just Ted left now anyways. Coupla years back, they added onto their garage - actually, just took the wheels off a boxcar and painted it to match the house... Well, Gladys said it was an eye sore - hated it. Told everyone so. Come one summer morning it collapsed and burned to the ground...
(slowing down, due to shot)
Only thing Gladys didn't count on was the Johnsons' annual garage sale. Five garage salers were...
(starting to slur)
traffed inzide. "Fad hy-rin" kiwled vive piples zat day - Fffffor hut? Hnuh?! A vifty-zent toafter, hats dut!

Annette passes out.

CUT TO:

INT. CAFE - COUNTER

Cathy serves food to the crew as she talks.

CATHY
Yous boys hear about the Conroy fire? Tragedy - lotta folks wonderin' 'bout that one.
(to crew guy)
You get a scoop-a hotdish with that. Y'want "Tuna Surprise" or "Three Meat Surprise?"

CREW GUY
I ordered french toast.

CATHY
And I asked you a question.

CREW GUY
Well, uh, could you recommend one?

CATHY
Oh wait. We're outta "surprise" today anyways. Have-a donut.

CUT TO:

EXT/INT. MOUNT ROSE V.F.W. - MAIN HALL

PUSH IN from SIGN ON FRONT DOOR to smokey room with DRUNKEN VETS at the bar and CONTESTANTS, in Sunday best, crowded around some tables. They couldn't seem more out of place.

SUPER: JUDGES INTERVIEWS

GLADYS
... So, remember the three most important parts of a good interview. Um, number one, Junior Miss Americas don't chew gum.

Iris holds out a Kleenex - girls put their gum in it.

JUMP CUT TO:

A FEW VETS pull a DRUNK VET AWAY from the girls. A table is TIPPED OVER. Gladys is flustered.

GLADYS
Everyone's okay, okay... That was... a, a life lesson, ladies. Alcohol does that to a man. So, uh, okay, movin' on... Uh, number two, the judges are as nervous as you are...

CUT TO:

V.F.W. - BACK ROOM

JUDGES - HAROLD, JOHN and JEAN KANGAS (Lester's secretary) sit at a table, clipboards in front of them, STARING at CAMERA. HANK sits behind them, fidgeting.

JOHN
(after long beat)
... Uh, I-I guess I could answer that... Yep. We're ready.... So, we should probably get the young girls in here, then. Y'know, to start the interviews...

CUT TO:

V.F.W. - MAIN HALL

GLADYS
...And number three: Junior Miss Americas don't cross their legs like streetwalkers. They sit - knees together, ankles crossed, hands folded on their lap.

Contestants try this. Gladys pulls a name from a hat.

GLADYS (CONT)
Very nice. Okay, first up - Janelle Betz.

Girls AD-LIB "GOOD LUCK." Janelle stands and SIGNS "THANK YOU."

CUT TO:

V.F.W. - BACK ROOM

JANELLE ENTERS, sits, then quickly remembers how to sit. Judges nervously look at their clipboards - pencils ready.

HAROLD
(trouble reading)
Uh, "Ask each girl, 'If you could be any tree in the woods, what kinda tree would you be?'"

As Janelle raises her hands to sign her answer, we:

DISSOLVE TO:

MONTAGE OF JUDGES INTERVIEWS

- ON TESS WEINHAUS, seated.

HAROLD (O.C.)
"...what kinda tree would you be?"

TESS
... Dogwood.

- ON LESLIE MILLER, seated, STARING for a long beat, then:

LESLIE
Green?

- ON THE JUDGES - Harold reads, John stares longingly.

HAROLD
"Then ask, 'Who would you pick to be president, dead or alive?'"

PAN OVER to MOLLY HOWARD.

MOLLY
Uh... Hirohito.

- ON BECKY

BECKY
(glancing at camera)
... My Mother, 'cause she could solve world hunger with one of her blue ribbon rhubarb pies, create world peace with one of her prayers and still find time to look beautiful for my dad, Lester Leeman.

- JOHN DOUGH drinks nervously from his water glass.

JOHN DOUGH
D-Do you like to swim?

The other judges look at him, then at their clipboards, trying to find this question.

- ON LISA SWENSON

LISA
Oh-yah, I love to swim. When I was in New York, I met Greg Louganis at one-a my brother's shows...

- ON HAROLD

HAROLD
You Amber Conroy?

AMBER (O.C.)
Yes.

All judges TURN A PAGE on their clipboards.

HAROLD
"Have Amber, 'Name and spell all the United States in alphabetical order.'"

PAN OVER to a STUNNED AMBER.

AMBER
Seriously?

HAROLD (O.C.)
Ah-yep.

Amber can't believe what she's hearing.

AMBER
Well, ah... Alabama. A-l-a...

DISSOLVE TO:

AMBER
... W-Y-O-M-I-N-G.

PAN OVER to judges - they can't believe it. HANK CLAPS RETARDEDLY - he loves her.

HAROLD
(looking at others)
Uh... Okay-then.

CUT TO:

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - LIBRARY

Iona Hildebrandt pages through library copies of fashion magazines - ripping out any "sexy" pictures.

IONA HILDEBRANDT
(to self as she rips)
... Bras-n-panties belong in the bedroom... Dirty girl belongs in the trash...

JUMP CUT TO:

IONA HILDEBRANDT
Yah-the night before the pageant is s'posed to be your dress rehearsal. Ours was shot to hell when we found out the Boys in Blue needed our help.

DISSOLVE TO:

BLACK & WHITE PHOTO MONTAGE (1945) - SAME AS BEGINNING

- YOUNG IONA and other CONTESTANTS give blood (on tables) and roll bandages beneath the gym stage - decorated for the next day's pageant.

IONA HILDEBRANDT (V.O.)
So we spent the night givin' blood, rollin' bandages and drawin' seams on the back-a each others bare legs --

- GIRLS are now turned over on the tables, asses to heaven, skirts pulled up. Others draw lines down the backs of their thighs -- it's the start of somethin' sexy.

IONA HILDEBRANDT (V.O. CONT)
Well, that was just for us, really. You don't realize how much you miss the boys 'til they're gone...

- GIRLS now have skirts rolled up - or off - shirts unbuttoned. Some are cuddling on tables, kissing, brushing each other's hair, etc. Hormones see no gender.

IONA HILDEBRANDT (V.O. CONT)
So, we did without a dress rehearsal 'cause times were tough. But we went to bed happy, knowin' in our own small way, we were helpin' to defeat the little slant-eyed monsters...

CUT TO:

BACKSTAGE - DRESSING ROOM

PAN DOWN long, narrow room. A counter, with MIRRORS and BARE BULBS, covers one wall. Girls set up their areas and change into their talent costumes.

SUPER: DRESS REHEARSAL

IRIS
Coupla things... Gladys wants to be sure we go in show order tonight...

CUT TO:

CLOSE ON LESLIE MILLER, in CHEERLEADING UNIFORM, standing beside SMALL FRAMED PHOTOS of her boyfriend on the counter.

LESLIE
(unusually serious)
Oh-yah, really nervous. It's been about two months. I haven't told my boyfriend yet. How did you know?

JUMP CUT TO:

LESLIE
(suddenly perky)
Oh! Nervous about the pageant! Yah - sure! That's why Pat's here - for luck.
(more)

LESLIE (CONT)
(pointing to photos)
This is him in his football uniform, wrestling uniform, baseball uniform... Me on his Trans-Am...

She kisses a photo and GIGGLES.

CUT TO:

CLOSE ON TESS WEINHAUS wearing "I LOVE GERMAN SHEPHERDS" sweatshirt, standing beside various TRINKETS.

TESS
Yah-these are for luck. Uh, this is my lucky unicorn... I had it in my backpack when I got hit by a bus in sixth grade... I lived. And, uh, this is my lucky bolt. They think it fell from a DC-10. The doctor said I was lucky the flat side hit me, um, otherwise it coulda gone right through my head.

CUT TO:

CLOSE ON BECKY - holding a SEQUIN-COVERED POODLE SKIRT AND SWEATER.

BECKY
There are eight thousand sequins and fifteen hundred beads on the skirt, alone. My mom had Mrs. Lopez make it. She's one of my father's many Mexican [Me'hee'kan] workers he lifts from the poverty they know in Mexico [Me'hee'koe].

CUT TO:

CLOSE ON AMBER CONROY at the far end of the counter.

AMBER
...Yah-my ma's clothes all melted onto mine forming like this big polyester meteor in our closet, y'know? But, in some kinda weird miracle, our neighbor-boy, Kenny Johanson, found my tap costume on the roof-a their trailer while he was settin' coon traps for his dad. Here's the weird part... It was <u>still on the hanger</u>.
(holds up red tap dress)
I know - I know, gives me the willies, too. I guess the explosion --

Janelle Betz, wearing a flowing, nymph-like dress with ballet slippers, glides up to Amber.

JANELLE
(slow, due to signing)
Amber? Can we switch numbers?
I need to go first...
(smiling to camera)
My cousin just had a deaf baby and I get to go see it!

AMBER
Yah-sure, eight's my lucky number anyway. Diane Sawyer was number eight at her local.

CUT TO:

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - GYM

ON STAGE "THROUGH THE EYES OF LOVE" plays as JANELLE performs her INTERPRETATIVE DANCE while SIGNING THE WORDS. In f.g., Gladys appears very serious.

GLADYS
(loud whisper)
... I'll be honest. This is a hard time for me. This is the part of the pageant when you realize that tomorrow night, all but one of these girls will walk out of here a loser. It's hard for me to know how that must feel, but I'm sure it doesn't feel good--

In b.g., a BIG STAGE LIGHT FALLS on Janelle's head. CRASH! Gladys and CAMERA RUSH THE STAGE. ["Through The Eyes of Love" continues throughout.]

CUT TO:

INT. LORETTA'S TRAILER - LIVING ROOM - THAT NIGHT

A very shaken Amber paces in this VERY NARROW LIVING ROOM. Faux wood, animal prints, etc. [Pure white trash.]

AMBER
Don't you get it? I was supposed to go first. I was contestant number one. That light was meant for my head... If Janelle hadn't wanted to change numbers... God, I owe my life to that deaf baby.

Loretta enters, portable phone and drink in hand.

LORETTA
That was your mom. She wanted you to have this.

AMBER
(taking drink)
Really, Loretta?

LORETTA
(avoiding eye contact)
You-betcha --

AMBER
My mom wanted me to have this.

LORETTA
Oh, shut up. I thought it might help you get some sleep.

AMBER
Loretta, never have kids.

LORETTA
Well God-love-ya for thinkin' I still could.

Loretta pulls a bag out of a closet and hands it to Amber.

LORETTA (CONT)
Here... Your ma did want you to have this since your other one got toasted and all...

Amber pulls out an ELEGANT GREEN GOWN.

AMBER
Oh... my... God. It's just like Diane Sawyer's! 'Course it's not a size ten - Diane was a little hippy back then. Oh, thank you! Thank you! Thank you!

She hugs Loretta.

CUT TO:

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL - MAIN ENTRANCE - EARLY EVENING

SUPER: DAY OF THE PAGEANT

BANNER: "Welcome to the Mount Rose Junior Miss America Pageant, 1996." The ENTIRE TOWN is excitedly entering.

CUT TO:

CLOSE ON Iona Hildebrandt as she enters.

IONA HILDEBRANDT
... I wouldn't miss it for all the tea in Gookland!

Behind her, Loretta pushes Annette in a wheelchair - portable I.V. LISA and her PARENTS enter behind.

ANNETTE
(singin' the blues)
...That's right, I said my best friend's a needle in my ass / That's why I don't got the blues no more / Yeah, yeah, my new best friend's a needle in my ass / That's why a poor, poor girl like me ain't got the blues no more...

LORETTA
Pain meds. Hope this thing ends before they do.

CLOSE ON Mr. and Mrs. Howard and their daughter Tina. All three wear T-SHIRTS WITH MOLLY'S FACE ON THEM.

MR. HOWARD
We have excitement. Big excitement.

MRS. HOWARD
Go Molly! Go! Number one daughter!

Behind them Leslie Miller's boyfriend, PAT, and a group of ROWDY GUYS approach.

PAT
Whooo! Leslie kicks Junior Miss ass! Go Muskies!

CUT TO:

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - GYM

STAGE IS DARK. Crowd takes their seats. You can feel the electricity.

CUT TO:

BACKSTAGE - WALKWAY

FOLLOW IRIS. She knocks on a door - home-made SIGN, "SOUND & LIGHTS" - then continues on.

IRIS
Two minutes, Charlie --

JANITOR
A-yup --

DOOR SWINGS OPEN, from knock. CHARLIE the JANITOR sits in this small closet, feet up on the opposite wall. A PANEL OF TWELVE LIGHT SWITCHES in front of him, a LARGE OLD BOOM BOX, TAPES around it, on the floor. He's leafing through "CAT FANCY" with love in his eyes. He reaches down and picks up a tape, looks at it, then slips it in the box --

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - GYM

We hear the TAPE OF A DRUM ROLL... SPOTLIGHT hits center stage. GLADYS ENTERS wearing a gaudy gown, takes mic. APPLAUSE!

GLADYS
Welcome... Welcome... Okay... Alright, now... Is this for me or the gown?

LAUGHTER. APPLAUSE trails off.

GLADYS (CONT)
Welcome to the Mount Rose Junior Miss America Pageant. While every contestant you'll meet tonight is special and unique, they all have one thing in common. They're all "Proud - to - be - an - American!"

WILD APPLAUSE! JAZZY PATRIOTIC MEDLEY TAPE. Gym doors FLY OPEN and like a Felliniesque Vegas review, Contestants enter wearing gowns and U.S. MONUMENT HEADDRESSES. They struggle to maintain balance as they DANCE - MOVING ONLY THEIR ARMS - on stage. BECKY, whose head is built like another president into MOUNT RUSHMORE, is first at the mic. [The "dance" continues behind each contestant as she steps up to the mic.]

BECKY
I chose Mount Rushmore, because to live in a country where you can take an ugly old mountain and put faces on it - faces of great Americans, who did so much to make our country super great - well, that makes me - Rebecca Leeman - PROUD TO BE AN AMERICAN!

CUT TO:

A MONTAGE OF OPENING NUMBER INTRODUCTIONS

-ON LISA SWENSON - wearing a STATUE OF LIBERTY HEADDRESS. [It's a Barbie Doll that holds an unlit birthday candle.]

LISA SWENSON
... Because living in a country where Lady Liberty keeps her flame burning bright --

She reaches up with a lighter to light the candle. It's hard to reach and won't light.

LISA SWENSON (CONT)
... Keeps her flame burning bright...

-ON LESLIE MILLER - as she seductively strokes the sides of her WASHINGTON MONUMENT HEADDRESS.

LESLIE MILLER
... To live in a country where you can build really tall and firm monuments that shoot straight up to the sky makes me - Leslie Miller - proud to be an American.

-ON MICHELLE JOHANSON - wearing a "HOLLYWOOD SIGN" HEADDRESS - steps away from the mic to APPLAUSE as AMBER - with a MAP OF THE U.S. HEADDRESS - "dances" up to the mic.

AMBER CONROY
... Because living in a country where no matter who you are or where you come from, you can grow up and become what you've always dreamed of, makes me - Amber Conroy - proud to be an American.

-ON LISA SWENSON as she whips her head around, desperately trying to put out Barbie's burning dress. She finally pulls it off her head and stomps out the flame.

-ON MOLLY HOWARD - wearing an ATOMIC BLAST AT HIROSHIMA HEADDRESS - as she steps away from the mic and TESS WEINHAUS, wearing a HUGE BALL OF TWINE HEADDRESS, "dances" up to the mic.

TESS WEINHAUS
Uh, this, uh, my Uncle Phil's World's Largest Ball of Twine, in Bundy Minnesota, makes me, um... It makes me proud I'm American - I kinda misunderstood the assignment...

The ball of twin falls to the floor and rolls off the stage, still attached at one end to her head.

CUT TO:

BACKSTAGE - DRESSING ROOM

Pandemonium! Contestants change into their "Physical Fitness" outfits. [T-shirts with red flags, shorts] Civil Servettes try to help. A LARGE PICTURE of JANELLE BETZ sits at her counter space.

IRIS
Okay... Okay! Listen-up, coupla notes from last night's dress rehearsal.
(off clipboard)
Number one - Gladys says a coupla yous are gettin' sexy with your hips durin' the "Physical Fitness" routine. Number two - there'll be none of that. Number three --

A dazed Tess Weinhaus approaches wearing only underwear.

TESS
I can't remember the dance. I can't remember... anythin'. Who am I?

IRIS
Phyllis?

A Servette steps in and puts her arm around Tess.

IRIS (CONT)
Number three - Leslie? Did you alter your outfit?

PAN OVER to Leslie in her PHYSICAL FITNESS shorts and t-shirt that are now skin-tight.

LESLIE
(obviously lying)
Nah-ah... This is just how they fit me.

AMBER
Oh my God!... My-my tap costume's gone.

COMMOTION STOPS. [Becky continues to get ready.]

IRIS
Uh, Amber? We're not puttin' on our Talent costumes. You need to put on your "Physical Fitness" outfit. And let's shake a leg, ladies.

AMBER
No, wait... It-it was here before the openin' number... Wait. What am I sayin'?... I should just ask you, Becky. Where is it?

Becky freezes, staring daggers at Amber.

BECKY
What?

AMBER
You heard me. Where is it?

The other contestants slowly clear a path between them.

BECKY
If you're gettin' at somethin', you better just say it.

AMBER
I just did.

BECKY
Well then, you better be willin' to back it up, 'cause you're talkin' crazy.

They start to SLOWLY CIRCLE EACH OTHER - a cat fight's a-brewin'. [Slow pre-fight rhythm to their dialogue.]

AMBER
Oh-oh, you bring me some of that snotty attitude, Becky - bring it on.

BECKY
Well, as my mother says at Sunday dinner, "Come and get it."

AMBER
Oh, I'll "get it." I'll "get it" all right. I might even take seconds.

They're moving ever closer...

BECKY
If you want seconds, then I'll make sure it's hot enough for ya.

IRIS
(stepping between them)
Girls! Girls!

CREW GUY (O.C.)
(barely audible)
Oh God, don't stop 'em now...

IRIS
(putting hand over camera)
Y'know, I-I don't think yous boys should, uh, should be in here while the girls are changin'.

CUT TO:

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - GYM

Gladys is center stage.

GLADYS
...Yah-so how 'bout a big round of applause for last year's Mount Rose Junior Miss America, in a farewell performance. Who could forget her lip-synching to "It's My Turn," by Diana Ross. Here she is, Mary Johanson!

APPLAUSE! Gladys EXITS. TAPED MUSIC: "IT'S MY TURN." A NURSE pushes MARY JOHANSON out in her WHEELCHAIR, complete with portable oxygen. Mary wears a GIGANTIC BLACK WIG and SILVER GOWN which HANGS OFF HER BONEY BODY. She moves her lips to the words as the NURSE PUSHES HER EMOTIONALLY around the stage.

CUT TO:

EXT. GYMNASIUM - HALLWAY

Contestants, in "PHYSICAL FITNESS" OUTFITS, wait outside the double doors, holding FRESHLY PAINTED RED, WHITE & BLUE STEP LADDERS. Becky and Amber stare at each other from opposite ends of the line.

LISA
Hey, my hands are stuck.

MOLLY
(sniffing)
Uh, I'm kinda dizzy from the fumes.

IRIS
Well, hold 'em away from you so it doesn't get on the outfits.
(turning to Servettes)
What kinda retard paints step ladders the morning of a pageant.

CUT TO:

ON STAGE

HANK is being pulled off stage by HAROLD. GLADYS adjusts her dress, frazzled.

HANK
(under throughout)
Here come the judge - pinch, pinch - here come the judge - pinch, pinch - here come the judge...

GLADYS
I'm okay, I'm okay - dress is fine. I'm okay... Well, our other judges are Jean Kangas...

CUT TO:

EXT. GYMNASIUM - HALLWAY

Iris and Servettes GO IN the gym as CHLORIS KLINGHAGEN COMES OUT.

CHLORIS KLINGHAGEN
(loud whisper)
Opening number looked, uh, good... Solid. But now you're gonna have to actually dance, so...
(holds up jar of Vaseline)
Here. Put a dab of this on the old choppers, ladies. It'll help you smile. And when they're lookin' at your teeth - God willin' - they won't be lookin' at your feet...

Chloris walks down the line, each girl takes a dab and rubs it on her teeth.

CHLORIS KLINGHAGEN (CONT)
C'mon Amber, don't make me stand on my head to see that smile.

AMBER
My costume's gone.

CHLORIS KLINGHAGEN
Huh?

AMBER
My tap dress - it's missin'.
(looking at Becky)
Someone took it.

CHLORIS KLINGHAGEN
Are you sure?

LISA
Yeah. She showed me the lucky hanger before the openin' number.

CHLORIS KLINGHAGEN
Here...

Chloris gives Amber the jar and exits. From the gym, we hear TAPED PATRIOTIC MUSIC. Contestants CHEER and run in.

CUT TO:

"PHYSICAL FITNESS" ROUTINE - PATRIOTIC MUSIC
As CUTS of patriotic dance moves PROGRESS, the girls have more and more red, white and blue paint smeared on their clothes, arms and legs. [Amber is clearly the best.] TAPED MUSIC ENDS. Contestants, COVERED WITH PAINT, strike a final pose - sitting on ladders, standing, kneeling. APPLAUSE.

CUT TO:

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - GYM

Iris stands center stage, awkwardly holding the mic.

IRIS
(beyond nervous)
Y-y-yah-so, the girls are gonna change now - for their talent, then. So...
(reading from notecard)
"I'd like to take you back seventeen years, when a peanut farmer was in the Whitehouse, a group-a boys callin' themselves 'Queen' topped the record charts and Gladys Leeman was Gladys Wood and she was Mount Rose Junior Miss America!"

Gladys enters wearing sash, tiara and PLAID CULOTTES. APPLAUSE. A SLIDE is shown of her at 17.

GLADYS
(taking microphone)
Thank you... Thank you. And my talent, seventeen years ago, was to sew these culottes, Butterick 5-2-4-7. Can you believe it? They still fit!
(pausing for applause)
Thank you, thank you. And speaking of talents, while practicing her talent last night, contestant number one, Janelle Betz, was struck on the head by a stage light. If we could say a quick prayer for her... Okay, then --

GLADYS (CONT)
(reading notecard)
"Contestant number two, Tess Weinhaus, has combined her love of dogs with - Huh?
(looking off stage)
Oh, I'm getting this signal from off stage.
(makes "stretch" signal)
In the theater, it means "staaaaaall."

CUT TO:

BACKSTAGE - OUTSIDE DRESSING ROOM

Contestants wait anxiously as they pass a CAN OF TURPENTINE and a RAG to remove paint from their arms and legs.

LISA
Yah-don't go in there. Tess blew chunks all over. Man, she ate a big dinner.

BECKY
Maybe she shoulda shoved that lucky bolt down her throat for dessert --

Becky storms off.

AMBER
(sotto, to other girls)
And the winner of the "Spirit" award is--

Girls LAUGH QUIETLY. Iris pulls a dazed and confused Tess - big wet spot on her shirt - through the shot.

CUT TO:

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - GYM

Gladys, desperate for material, is now showing her hem.

GLADYS
...I used a slip stitch hem after a finishing stitch. Why, you ask? Well, I'll tell you. I felt it would hold better than a simple machine hem.
(looking off-stage)
Oh-praise the Lord. Contestant number two is ready. Here she is, Tess Weinhaus...

APPLAUSE. Tess is pushed on stage.

CUT TO:

BACKSTAGE - LEFT

Amber paces. ON STAGE Tess drones on at the mic.

TESS
(in the b.g. throughout)
The beagle is known for it's howl. "Aaauuuuhhhh." The Pekinese has it's own distinctive bark. "Yip, yip, yip." Not to be confused with the Chihuahua's, "Yap, yap, yap." But none can compare to the greatest bark of all - the German Shepherd...

AMBER
(to camera, loud whisper)
... Yah-it's just gone...
(eyes welling up)
I mean, I-I just wanna tap, y'know? I'm not sayin' I'm the best, or that I'd even win, but shouldn't I at least get a chance to compete?
(starting to sob)
I just wanted my Mom to see me dance.

CHLORIS KLINGHAGEN enters, small bag in hand.

CHLORIS KLINGHAGEN
(loud whisper)
Amber - Amber, c'mere.

AMBER
Please, Mrs. K, I got so much Vaseline on my teeth, I'm gonna be smilin' for a year.

CHLORIS KLINGHAGEN
No. Here.

Chloris pulls a simple BLACK LEOTARD from the bag.

CHLORIS KLINGHAGEN (CONT)
It's nothin' special, but talent like yours doesn't need to hide behind sequins.

AMBER
Mrs. K --

CHLORIS KLINGHAGEN
You're... You're special and... Ah Hell, go out there and kick some Leeman ass.

Amber, overcome with joy, gives her a big hug.

CHLORIS KLINGHAGEN (CONT)
Not so hard, Sweetie. I heard somethin' snap...

CUT TO:

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - GYM

ON STAGE - LESLIE MILLER, in uniform, PERFORMS an AMAZINGLY SEXY CHEER as TWO SINGLET-CLAD WRESTLERS WRESTLE. [One is boyfriend, Pat]

LESLIE
Roll him over --
(clap, clap, clap)
Lay him flat --
(clap, clap, clap)
Pin his shoulders --
(clap, clap, clap)
To the mat --
(clap, clap, clap)
Roll him over - Lay him flat - Pin his shoulders - To the mat! Yeaaahhh!

She JUMPS, KICKS, ends with SPLITS. APPLAUSE!

CUT TO:

BACKSTAGE - LEFT

Amber, now in the leotard, talks to Iris. ON STAGE MICHELLE JOHANSON, wearing all black, performs from "Soylent Green."

AMBER
(loud whisper)
Mrs. Clark, why are you doing this to me? Why're you pretendin' you don't know what's goin' on?

IRIS
Amber, I'm sorry... I really am. But you know the rules. All talent costumes hafta be okay'd by Gladys before the pageant.

AMBER
But, doesn't someone taking your costume so you can't compete, overrule that rule?

IRIS
Sorry. I-I don't make the rules.

AMBER
This... This... This is bullshit!

IRIS
Amber Conroy! That is not Junior Miss America language.

AMBER
Good, 'cause this isn't a Junior Miss America Pageant - it's... it's Nazi Germany!

Amber storms off.

IRIS
(shaking head)
Where do they get this stuff...

CUT TO:

CAMERA FOLLOWS AMBER as she storms over to BACKSTAGE - RIGHT where Gladys watches Michelle ON STAGE.

AMBER
Mrs. Leeman?

GLADYS
(turning)
Huh?

AMBER
I-I'm wearin' this costume. I'm, uh, I'm gonna do my talent tonight.

GLADYS
Oh really - I don't think so --
(suddenly aware of camera)
Uh, Amber, I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but rules state that a costume must be okay'd at least a week in advance. And this --
(pointing to costume)
This is why we have the rule. My goodness gracious, I couldn't allow a neckline this low on stage. We have kids in the audience.

AMBER
But, you - I mean... It's not my fault. I-I... Please? I didn't do anything wrong...

Amber starts to CRY.

MICHELLE (ON STAGE)
(climaxing)
... That's why... I must say...
(raising arm upward)
Soylent Green... is... people.

She doubles over. She's given it all. APPLAUSE.

GLADYS
Oops, that's my cue...

Gladys starts out on stage.

CUT TO:

BACKSTAGE - LEFT

Lisa - top hat, tails, giant "I LOVE NY" button - and others try to console a CRYING Amber. ON STAGE - MOLLY HOWARD does a line dance to TAPE OF "ACHY BREAKY HEART." She walks, turns, CLAPS, fires fingers in the air like guns...

LISA
(arm around Amber)
Oh, Amber...

AMBER
(can't catch breath)
I-I-I-I-I, j-uh-j-uh-just wanted to...
compe-e-e-e-ete.

LISA
I can't believe this is happenin'. I can't believe she said you couldn't...

Getting an idea, Lisa starts to take off her jacket.

LISA (CONT)
Amber?... Here.

AMBER
(still sobbing)
"Here," wh-wh-wh-what?

LISA
My jacket. Take it 'cause, y'know, I got my costume okay'd before the pageant. You can wear it.

MICHELLE
Oh man, Lisa, I wouldn't do this --

LESLIE
(to Lisa)
They're never gonna let you perform naked. I asked.

LISA
Shut up, yous guys. Look, Amber, I'm not gonna win. And let's be honest, a family only needs one "Liza" and you know Peter's got much better legs than me.

AMBER
Your parents'd kill you.

LISA
Oh c'mon, I love 'em, but you know they only had me 'cause Peter needed a kidney.

AMBER
Lis, I want to, I really do, but... Oh, I-I can't.

LISA
Then do it for Peter. Mrs. Leeman used to call him a "skinny little fag" when he'd bag her groceries. He'd pop his Nancy-belt if his old jacket somehow - I don't know - got her back.

AMBER
Yah?

LISA
Oh-you-betcha.

Amber hugs her and takes the jacket as Iris approaches.

IRIS
C'mon, other side, Lisa. You're up.

LISA
I quit. And, uh, since my costume, y'know, was okay'd a month ago? I'm givin' it to Amber.

Amber breaks a smile.

CUT TO:

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - GYM

Gladys is center stage.

GLADYS
...Uh, I was just told that contestant number six, Lisa Swenson, has quit the pageant.

CROWD REACTS.

GLADYS (CONT)
Well, these things happen, so... It's with overwhelming pride that I introduce contestant number seven, who also happens to be president of her class - two years running - a member of the honor roll and the new President of the Lutheran Sisterhood Gun Club - Rebecca Ann Leeman!

STAGE GOES BLACK. SPOT HITS BECKY, who sits at EDGE OF STAGE, holding a mic. She's head to toe sequins in her poodle skirt, sweater, saddle shoes, etc. TAPED INTRO TO "MY GUY."

BECKY
(talking over music)
I don't know how many of you know this, but I've got a very special fella in my life - that's right, I do...

SPOT FOLLOWS as Becky stands and walks center stage to what appears to be a COVERED MANNEQUIN.

BECKY (CONT)
He walks with me, he talks with me, he took my heart and I can't seem to get it back. I guess it's his forever. I guess you could say... he's "My Guy."

Becky removes the sheet, revealing a MANNEQUIN dressed like JESUS as he appeared on the cross - long hair, beard, crown of thorns, loincloth. The ARMS ARE STUFFED so they move freely. [Hands have stigmata.]

BECKY (CONT)
"NOTHIN' YOU COULD SAY COULD TEAR ME AWAY FROM MY GUY / NOTHIN' YOU COULD DO 'CAUSE I'M STUCK LIKE GLUE TO MY GUY / I'M STICKIN' TO MY GUY LIKE A STAMP TO A LETTER LIKE BIRDS OF A FEATHER WE STICK TOGETHER / I'M TELLIN' YOU FROM THE START I CAN'T BE TORN APART FROM MY GUY..."

Becky TALK-SINGS - a la William Shatner's "Rocket Man" - and DANCES around the Jesus mannequin doing the jitter-bug, the twist and a slow dance (his arms on her shoulders).

During the slow dance, the loin cloth slips and Becky must hold it up - giving the appearance of grabbing his crotch. TAPED MUSIC ENDS. APPLAUSE. Gladys, mic in hand, joins Becky for a big hug.

GLADYS
Boy, I'd hate to follow that. Wow!

Becky exits, pulling the wheeled Jesus behind her.

GLADYS (CONT)
Voice of an angel, that one... Okay, we still have one more contestant - number eight, Amber Conroy.

Gladys exits. A TAPED HIP, HOT DRUM BEAT STARTS. Suddenly, Amber glides into CENTER SPOT. [Now wearing Lisa's costume, sleeves rolled up.] Her feet burst into AN AMAZING ROUTINE. The loud drum beats seem to fly from her hands and feet as they punctuate the rhythm. There's no glitz, just unbelievable skill. It appears effortless as she floats around stage. Like watching Michael Jackson moon walk for the first time, you can't take your eyes off her. She concludes, center stage, with the GREATEST THIRTY SECONDS OF HER LIFE. THE AUDIENCE GOES WILD! Amber takes bow after bow - they love her. Gladys enters, mic in hand.

GLADYS
Okay... Okay... Okay!... Well now, it's finally time to say good-bye to our judges, so they can go make the toughest decision of their lives.

PAN TO Judges who look NERVOUS AS HELL. A relaxed Hank sniffs from a paint soaked bag.

CUT TO:

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - CLASS ROOM

Judges are FRANTICALLY SEARCHING THE ROOM. The only sound is <u>HANK'S LOUD BREATHING</u> from the paint soaked bag.

JOHN
... Oh for fuck-sake! Can't he stop with that?!

HAROLD
Watch it, college-boy. Hanky can't help it he's born crazier-n-a shit-house rat.

JOHN
Well, why didn't you just leave him with a sitter?

Hank FREEZES, then starts to WAIL!

HANK
EEE-AAAYEEEE-AAAAAYUOIAAEEEEEEE!

HAROLD
Oh, real nice, John. Real nice. You know the sitter's dead.

JOHN
Oh God, that's right. I-I-I'm just a little stressed. I'm sorry.

HAROLD
Don't tell me. Tell Hank.

JOHN
Hey, Hank, sorry... Sorry, buddy.

Hank STOPS CRYING and goes back to the bag.

HANK
(between deep breaths)
Guns don't kill people... People kill people... Guns don't kill people... People kill people...

Judges continue their search. After a beat...

DOCUMENTARIAN (O.C.)
Uh, what're you guys looking for?

JOHN
A fuckin' pen, okay pal? We forgot a fuckin' pen!

A HAND WITH PEN comes into frame.

JUMP CUT TO:

JOHN
A fuckin' calculator, okay pal? We don't got a fuckin' calculator.

A HAND WITH CALCULATOR comes into frame.

DISSOLVE TO:

BACKSTAGE - DRESSING ROOM

Girls, in gowns, sit in silence. Becky and Amber sit at opposite ends of the room. There's OBVIOUS TENSION.

LESLIE
... So, anyone talk to Janelle?

AMBER
Yah-I brought her some flowers this morning. She's in the room next to my mom. She's super happy.

Girls AD-LIB SHOCK.

AMBER (CONT)
Yah -- The blow to her head made her deaf...

Girls AD-LIB "Oh. I see. Okay-then." etc. Another LONG BEAT of SILENCE follows. Becky gets up to re-touch her make-up.

BECKY
(losing it)
... Oh, good Lord! What're they doin' - lettin' the retard count votes?!

Contestants stare at her in shock. Iris enters.

IRIS
It's time, ladies.

CUT TO:

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - GYM

Judges are back. Gladys is center stage. Girls enter and form a line behind her. TAPED AMERICAN MEDLEY STARTS.

GLADYS
Welcome back, everyone - judges. Boy-oh-boy, this reminds me of a little story when I was --

JUMP CUT TO:

Gladys holds an ENVELOPE and TINY TROPHY.

GLADYS
(opening envelope)
... And the "Spirit of Junior Miss" award, voted on by the girls themselves, goes to... Rebecca Ann Leeman!

APPLAUSE. Contestants look around in disbelief. TAPED FANFARE. Becky steps forward. Gladys kisses her and gives her the trophy.

GLADYS (CONT)
(to audience)
I'm not gonna cry. I promised myself, I'm not gonna cry.

Audience CHUCKLES.

GLADYS (CONT)
This reminds me of when I was --

JUMP CUT TO:

Gladys opens an ENVELOPE.

GLADYS
... Our Second Runner-Up and winner of a fifty dollar scholarship for the college or vo-tech of her choice is... Contestant number three, Leslie Miller!

TAPED FANFARE. Leslie bounds forward, grabs her trophy, stands to one side.

PAT (O.C.)
You rule, Leslie!

AUDIENCE LAUGHS. Leslie waves.

GLADYS
Our next prize, a seventy-five dollar scholarship --

AUDIENCE AD-LIBS AMAZEMENT.

GLADYS (CONT)
-- will be awarded to the First Runner-Up. Just in case the winner can't do everything she's s'posed to, y'know, the First Runner-Up takes over, then.

TAPED DRUM ROLL... Contestants [except Becky] take hands. Iris gives Gladys an envelope and trophy.

GLADYS (CONT)
And the First Runner-Up is --
(opening envelope, face drops)
Contestant number eight, Amber Conroy.

AD-LIB AUDIENCE SHOCK, DISBELIEF. Contestants are stunned. Amber steps forward, humbly takes the trophy and stands beside Leslie. AUDIENCE FINALLY QUIETS.

GLADYS (CONT)
And finally, the moment I know I've been waiting for...

Iris hands Gladys a LARGE TROPHY and envelope. MARY JOHANSON is WHEELED OUT wearing sash and tiara.

GLADYS (CONT)
With a scholarship of five hundred dollars, courtesy Leeman Furniture, and all expenses paid for next weekend when she'll be competin' for the title of Minnesota Junior Miss America...

TAPED DRUM ROLL. Gladys opens the envelope.

GLADYS (CONT)
Our new Mount Rose Junior Miss America is contestant number - ah heck, she's my daughter - number seven, Rebecca Ann Leeman!

POLITE AUDIENCE APPLAUSE. Becky rushes forward. Gladys RIPS the TIARA and SASH OFF MARY - places them on Becky.

The ELDERLY MAN/MAYOR, from earlier scene, enters and SINGS TO A TAPE as Becky takes her victory walk.

ELDERLY MAN/MAYOR
(tune of "Miss America")
"Here she is... Our Mount Rose Junior Miss America... Look at her... Doesn't she look fine... Our hearts swell big, as we look at her... Our Mount Rose Junior Miss America..."

CUT TO:

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL - LATER

Crowd files out. Mr. and Mrs. Howard [not wearing Molly t-shirt] and Tina [still wearing t-shirt] pass by.

MR. HOWARD
(to camera)
We sorry Molly not Junior Miss America. Shame us all.

TINA
She tried her best --

MR. HOWARD
Shut up and take off that stupid shirt!

Molly runs up.

MOLLY
Mom, Dad, wait!

AMBULANCE pulls up. Mary Johanson, unconscious, slumped in wheelchair, is brought out and put in. AMBER and LORETTA wheel ANNETTE out. PARAMEDICS put her in, too.

JUMP CUT TO:

Amber faces camera as AMBULANCE PULLS AWAY.

AMBER
Oh, Mom's okay. They're just givin' her a ride back. She almost blew outta the back of Loretta's pick-up on the way over.

LORETTA
Thank God for bunge cords.

JUMP CUT TO:

AMBER
(tearing up)
... Yah-well, at least, y'know, I got to perform... And Mom got to see me...
(crying)
I guess number eight only worked for Diane Sawyer...

Loretta puts her arm around Amber. They walk off as LESLIE and PAT approach.

LESLIE
Hey-hey, I'm Second Runner-Up! Whooo! I got second place!

PAT
Third.

LESLIE
Huh?

LISA passes by with her PARENTS - they look pissed.

LISA
...No, it <u>was</u> worth it. Amber shoulda won.

LISA'S FATHER
I'll tell ya one thing. Peter never woulda pulled a shenanigan like that.

LISA
Well, y'know what, dad? Y'know what? Peter's gay!

She runs off. Her parents STOP DEAD IN THEIR TRACKS.

LISA'S FATHER
What?! What the hell --

DISSOLVE TO:

CLOSE ON Becky's face as FLASHES illuminate it. With each photo she CHANGES her SMILE and EXPRESSION. She loves this.

PULL BACK to reveal we're:

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - CLASSROOM

TWO OLDER MEN, with old-style news cameras, FLASH PICTURES.

DOCUMENTARIAN (O.C.)
So, how does it feel to be the new Mount Rose Junior Miss America, Becky?

OLDER MEN turn and look at camera, then take out a PEN and NOTE PAD.

BECKY
Well, it's all happenin' so fast. Goodness-gracious, it hardly seems real, y'know? I mean, I won! I'm the winner! I'm going to State!

CUT TO:

MOUNT ROSE MAIN STREET - NEXT DAY

BEAUTIFUL SUNNY DAY. A LARGE RED RIBBON is being stretched ACROSS MAIN STREET. Lester talks to camera.

LESTER
Ahh... Beautiful as a whore's ass today. Eh, boys?

In the b.g., Gladys holds a bullhorn, clipboard and points to a LARGE SWAN FLOAT.

GLADYS
(into bullhorn)
Hey! Turn that float around. You think a swan's gonna swim ass first up Main Street?

LESTER
Yah-Gladys had me order that swan special made from Mexico [Me'hee'koe] in case Becky won. I do a lotta business with those people. I always offer to pay 'em in tacos --
(laughing)
Whoo, they love that...

CUT TO:

MOUNT ROSE MAIN STREET - LATER

ENTIRE TOWN lines the road. The MAYOR and the LEEMAN FAMILY stand BEHIND the RED RIBBON. PARADE PARTICIPANTS are lined up behind them.

MAYOR
(into bullhorn)
Yah-hello-hello... Shit! How the fuck do-ya work this damn thing - huh? Oh. Welcome to our first ever Junior Miss America Parade - which also happens to be the unveiling of our new sewer system!

CHEERS! Becky cuts the ribbon. MORE CHEERS!

MAYOR (CONT)
Yah-so, while Becky gets on her float, then, any questions 'bout the new sewer?... Yah, Clem?...

PUSH PAST Mayor, DOWN PARADE LINE-UP:

- THREE FAT VETS hold American, Minnesota and POW/MIA flags.
- TWO BATON TWIRLERS stand in front of the Mount Rose HIGH SCHOOL BAND. THEY WARM UP - OUT OF KEY.
- JUDGES wave from a convertible. HANK, in passenger's seat, struggles to get out - seatbelt prevents it.
- TWO GRUNGY OLD CLOWNS smoke impatiently.
- TWO FAT WHITE MEN, dressed as INDIANS, sit on HORSES.
- FAT MAN drives a riding lawnmower, pulling a flatbed with BROWNIES and GIRL SCOUTS on it.
- FARMER pulls a GOAT with a sign: "MILK ME, $1.00"
- LESTER gets into a sporty convertible with a sign: "LEEMAN FURNITURE - THE PROUD PARENTS."

CUT TO:

HOME VIDEO - FROM MR. HOWARD'S VIDEO CAMERA

MOVING SHOTS of GROUND and FEET. PULL UP to see the parade and TOWN FOLK. CATCH Iona Hildebrandt staring daggers.

MR. HOWARD (O.C.)
Okay, okay, first parade in American.

MOLLY (O.C.)
America, Daddy.

MR. HOWARD (O.C.)
Shut up, Molly.

MOLLY (O.C.)
When's Tina coming home?

MR. HOWARD (O.C.)
She run away 'cause you such a loser!

PAN OVER to see Gladys helping Becky climb on the SWAN, unaware of camera. In b.g., DOCUMENTARY CREW interviews Amber and Leslie on their car behind the swan float.

GLADYS
C'mon, Rebecca, you wanted it. Now get up there. Ride it side-saddle if you have to - like a horse. C'mon, now --

BECKY
It smells funny - like gasoline.

GLADYS
Oh for Christsake, everything smells like that in Mexico.

BECKY
My dress'll reek.

GLADYS
(losing it)
Listen, little missy, this cost your Dad a pretty penny. Now get your ass up there and show me some teeth.

BACK TO DOCUMENTARY CAMERA

AMBER and LESLIE, in gowns, look unhappy as EXHAUST FUMES - that appear to come from the SWAN'S ASS - cover their OLD CONVERTIBLE.

AMBER
... Oh-yah, this is exactly how I pictured it - chokin' on swan gas.

GLADYS (O.C.)
Excuse me. Yoo-hoo...

Gladys enters shot.

GLADYS
Do yous boys have a lighter? I gotta light Becky's sparklers. It's supposed to look like a glistenin' lake beneath the swan...

CREW GUY hands her a lighter. Gladys starts to LIGHT SPARKLERS at the BASE OF THE SWAN. SUDDENLY, like a gasoline soaked pinata, it EXPLODES! Gladys is thrown back. FLAMES! SCREAMING! PANDEMONIUM! BECKY doesn't have a chance. She's a PINK TAFFETA BALL OF FIRE. The SWAN'S BACK eventually COLLAPSES taking Becky INTO IT'S BURNING BELLY. INTERCUT with MR. HOWARD'S VIDEO. Gladys watches in stunned silence as her daughter and only chance at State go up in flames... SUDDENLY, SHE CRACKS!

GLADYS
Oh my God - my baby! The swan ate my baby!...
(grabbing at burning float)
Ow-ow-ow! Get up, Rebecca! Get outta there... We've gotta go to State...
Oh, hot!...
(putting out fire on shirt)
Oh, damn. I liked this blouse...
Rebecca! Get up, angel face, time to go to State!... Ow-ow-ow!

Eventually, Gladys tries to climb up on the float. IRIS pulls her off.

GLADYS (CONT)
Get offa me, you cow!

Gladys spins and notices the silent CROWD.

GLADYS (CONT)
What're <u>you</u> lookin' at? Huh? A whole <u>God damn</u> town of <u>losers</u> - that's what <u>I'm</u> lookin' at!

Crowd REACTS. Gladys notices Amber and runs up to her car.

GLADYS (CONT)
You - you piece-a-shit trailer trash. This shoulda been you! Damn, I shoulda killed you when I had the chance, just like your little friend. Boy, Tammy was one crispy critter on that thresher! Ding - fries are up!...

The Crowd REACTS again. Gladys spins, noticing someone. Lester approaches.

GLADYS (CONT)
Hey, Ted, sorry. I didn't know your family was in the garage when I set it on fire!

LESTER
Gladys! Stop it --

GLADYS
Guess it wasn't a garage sale as much as it was a BAKE SALE... Ah-hahahahaaaaa!

Lester tries to pull her away from the crowd.

GLADYS (CONT)
Let go-a-me, you old bastard!

She grabs a BURNING 2X4 off float and starts swinging it.

GLADYS (CONT)
At least you've got another daughter.

CROWD GASPS, then STUNNED SILENCE. CAMERA CIRCLES Gladys and Lester getting REACTION SHOTS of the CROWD.

LESTER
So help me, Gladys --

GLADYS
Becky was my only shot at State!

LESTER
That's enough!

GLADYS
What do you think - I'm stupid? I know you judged the pageant, screwed me in the boy's john, then went in the Home-Ec room and put a bun in Annette's oven! You were -- Uh!

TWIN OFFICERS - followed by a "COPS" TV CREW - run up and AGGRESSIVELY TACKLE Gladys. As the STRUGGLE ON THE GROUND CONTINUES, CREW GUYS go over and shake hands with the "COPS" CREW - obviously knowing them.

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL - CORRIDOR

Annette, looking horrible, is wheeled toward surgery on a gurney, BEER CAN STILL IN HAND. Amber and Loretta follow.

ANNETTE
(drowsy)
I just wish you coulda found out some other way, Pumpkin. I hated lyin' to you all these years.

AMBER
I know, Mom. It's okay... I shoulda known something was up with the new dinette sets every Christmas.

LORETTA
(sotto)
Christ-almighty... Who hasn't he screwed?

Off Annette and Amber's looks, we:

CUT TO:

EXT. GRAVEYARD

Lovely hillside. A PASTOR and TOWN FOLK - heads bowed - stand beside a FRESH GRAVE.

PASTOR
... That's why, dear Lord, it's with such great sorrow that we turn over to you a young woman whose dream of ridin' on a giant swan brought about her untimely death... Maybe it's your way of telling us to buy American...

CUT TO:

The funeral is over. Amber, Loretta, Iris and Servettes awkwardly face each other beside the grave. Iris takes the PARTIALLY MELTED TIARA from the headstone.

IRIS
As, uh, actin' President of the Mount Rose Civil Servettes, it's my duty, since Becky can't fulfill her duties - 'cause she's dead-n-all - to make you Mount Rose Junior Miss America.

She puts the TIARA ON AMBER. Loretta FLASHES pictures.

CUT TO:

ON IRIS and SERVETTES, alone in the cemetery.

IRIS
Yah-Lester skipped town. Rumor has it he's down in Iowa. You can run, but you can't hide from the Lord.

Servettes AD-LIB AGREEMENT.

IRIS (CONT)
Musta been some pageant night... He's lucky he never tried anythin' with me... I never liked him.

Servettes AD-LIB, "Yah-me neither. You-betcha." Etc.

CUT TO:

INT. CAFE

CATHY
Ding dong the bitch is dead. I hope they lock Gladys up and throw away the key. Amber deserved to win.

CUT TO:

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - LIBRARY

IONA HILDEBRANDT
... I wouldn't be surprised if this was all a hoax so Rebecca Leeman could get outta payin' her library fines. You'd expect this kinda behavior from a little Gook-kid, but not one of our own... Reminds me of Pearl Harbor...

An ASIAN CREW GUY has had enough and STEPS INTO FRAME - others pull him back.

CUT TO:

INT. DAKOTA COUNTY EATING DISORDERS CLINIC

Our CANDY STRIPER stands outside Mary's room.

CANDY STRIPER
Yah-we come over to the Eatin' Disorders Clinic to spread our cheer two days a week. It's good trainin' to work with sick people and really skinny people... This week I learned you have to watch the treat cart around the bulemics.

JUMP CUT TO:

CANDY STRIPER
... I'm sure if Mary was conscious, she'd wish Amber lots-o-luck at State. If you want, there's a binge-eater and a coupla bulemics at the end of the hall who were also in pageants - you could probably talk to them...

EXT. LORETTA'S TRAILER

AMBER sits on the picnic table. In the b.g., Loretta exits her trailer with a FED-EX GUY. She PATS HIS BUNS as he exits. She approaches Amber with a packet.

AMBER
Yah-course I feel bad about Becky - her bein' my half-sister and all. I mean, I never liked her, but she didn't deserve to die in the belly of a swan like that... The whole thing's just kinda... y'know, sad and gross at the same time.

LORETTA
(handing over packet)
This came for you, Sweetie.

AMBER
Ah! It's from State! Oh my God!

Amber rips it open and holds up a COLOR BROCHURE with COLLEEN and TERRY in a glamour shot on the cover.

AMBER (CONT)
(paging through packet)
It's all the stuff I get to do. Oh my God, oh my God... Okay, okay... We get a "personal consultation" with a make-up artist -- Eeeh! Okay, um, there'll be a choreographer to the stars and, oh no -- No way. Oh... my... God --

LORETTA
What? For Christsake, spit it out.

AMBER
I'll be stayin' overnight at... The AIRPORT HOWARD JOHNSONS!

LORETTA
Right by the airport - Oh, Amber...

AMBER
There's an indoor pool! AHHHHHH!

Loretta JOINS IN THE SCREAMING.

AMBER (CONT)
Oh crap - I only got four days. I gotta practice!

CUT TO:

MONTAGE BEGINS over MUSIC.

- MORNING. Amber emerges from Loretta's trailer, Pop Tart in mouth, book bag in hand. SMILES. WAVES. TAPS HER WAY down the road, out of the trailer park.
- CAFETERIA. Amber scrapes trays. PAN DOWN. She wears tap shoes, practices her routine.
- HOSPITAL. Amber walks around the room in high heels, balancing a bedpan on her head.
- MORTUARY. Amber dances around the room, using a SUIT ON A HANGER as a partner. A NAKED OLD MAN is on the embalming slab, a sheet covering his nasties.
- EXT. LORETTA'S TRAILER - NIGHT. In SILHOUETTE, Amber taps on the picnic table by the light of the FULL HARVEST MOON.

DIP TO BLACK:

<u>WHITE LETTERS ON BLACK: "STATE FINALS"</u>

EXT. AIRPORT HOWARD JOHNSONS

SIGN READS: "WELCOME JUNIOR MISS AMERICAS, FRIED CLAM PLATTER $9.99."

IONA HILDEBRANDT (V.O.)
(over the following)
I'll never forget State. Most excitin' weekend of my life. The audience was filled with our boys who'd been sent home on medical leave. We'd been without 'em for so long, we didn't mind that most were missin' ears, arms or the occasional bottom half...

MR. ROOT unloads Amber's luggage from the HEARSE. LORETTA leans against it, arm around AMBER, smoking and occasionally flipping off PEOPLE who stop to stare at this unusual sight.

CUT TO:

INT. HOWARD JOHNSONS - POOL AREA

There's a fake tropical look, with loads of plastic palms, etc. BANNER: "STATE FINALS - SPONSORED BY THE MINNESOTA MODELING ACADEMY" Contestants (20) sit at tables around the pool. Amber smiles and gives a little wave. COLLEEN and TERRY work the room like they've done for many years.

SUPER: COLLEEN DOUGLAS AND TERRY MACEY - MINNESOTA JUNIOR MISS AMERICA STATE BOARD AND OWNERS OF THE MINNESOTA MODELING ACADEMY

TERRY
... And Mount Rose Junior Miss America?

Amber raises her hand.

TERRY (CONT)
Funny, you don't look dead.

Terry and Colleen share a laugh. Amber smiles politely.

COLLEEN
Okay ladies, listen up. I'm Colleen Douglas and this raving beauty on my right --

TERRY
I'm a mirror.

COLLEEN
Correction. This cheeky little monkey on my right is Terry Macey. And we are your Minnesota Junior Miss America State Board.

TERRY
We're also the co-founders of the Minnesota Modeling Academy. Applications are at the tiki bar. We'll wave the fifty dollar application fee to anyone who's accepted today or if you list a friend and put her address.

CUT TO:

EXT. MINNESOTA MODELING ACADEMY

SIGN on WINDOW: "Minnesota Modeling Academy." YOUNG WOMAN, average looking, faces camera.

YOUNG WOMAN
Yah, I was "accepted" to the Academy. Accepted 'cause my check cleared. Five hundred bucks every six weeks.
(more)

YOUNG WOMAN (CONT)
They go, "Oh, you remind us of a young Cindy Crawford." Well, fifteen hundred bucks later, I'm lookin' in the mirror goin', "I look like fuckin' Ricky Lake." That's when I sued...

CUT TO:

INT. HOWARD JOHNSONS - POOL AREA

TERRY
Due to budgetary cutbacks - and the fact that Nationals didn't cough up a fuckin' nickel this year - you won't be stayin' overnight. So pay attention, you've got about eight hours until showtime.

An indignant MISS BURNSVILLE stands.

MISS BURNSVILLE
Uh, excuse me, but I didn't get any notification about these changes.

COLLEEN
And I didn't get Madonna's ass - these things happen, Cutie. Sit down.

CUT TO:

Colleen and Terry smoke and drink at a tall tiki table that's covered with empties. In the b.g., a pageant worker passes out PINK BAGS to the contestants. All the while, TWO FAT KIDS play "MARCO POLO" in the pool.

TERRY
(sotto)
Christ it's hot in here, or else I'm "changin'" back.

COLLEEN
(tipsy, holding up glass)
I can sum up our entire philosophy with this glass. I look at it and say, "It's half full." Which, in the beauty pageant biz means, "Where the hell's my waiter!"

She LAUGHS hard, then SPINS AROUND in her chair.

COLLEEN (CONT)
(screaming)
Stop with the fuckin' Marco-Polo before I rip your fat little heads off!
(back to camera)
Sorry. I'll take that again - acting natural - in 5-4-3... 2...

She's distracted by her drink and MUMBLES OFF.

TERRY
(tipsy)
Our entire focus here is the girls. We put together a pageant team that's second da mum. Our goal is for the girls to be the best and... most beautiful contestants can they... can... they be.

CUT TO:

Colleen and Terry, drinks in hand, address the contestants. PINK COSMETICS, from the pink bags, cover their tables.

COLLEEN
Before we begin with your personal make-up consultation, let me start by sayin'- you touch it, you buy it -- at a discount of course. Ten percent for the next half hour - twenty if you become a student at the Minnesota Modeling Academy or want to become a Keri May Representative...

CUT TO:

EXT. MINNESOTA MODELING ACADEMY

YOUNG WOMAN
... "Beauty consultants?" They're fuckin' dealers. First they get you hooked on the shit - a little cover-up, then some base. Pretty soon I'm sittin' at school tryin' to figure out how I can sneak into the bathroom for a quick touch-up. And when you bottom out, they say they'll discount the shit if you sell it. I was worse than a crack head...

CUT TO:

INT. HOWARD JOHNSONS - POOL AREA

Contestants wait in line beside a SMALL PLATFORM near the pool. MR. MELCHOIR - over-weight, all in black, sweating - stands silently with ED, his assistant, also in black.

SUPER: SERGE MELCHOIR - CHOREOGRAPHER TO THE STARS

ED
... Mr. Melchoir's work nationally includes "Sweatin' to the Oldies" one, two and three --

MR. MELCHOIR
Not three.

ED
Huh?

MR. MELCHOIR
They cut my number.

ED
Bastards.

MR. MELCHOIR
Whatever.

ED
Locally, Mr. Melchoir's work includes the Children's Theatre production of "Danny, the Littlest Tiger." He's also the resident choreographer and runway instructor at the Minnesota Modeling Academy.

CUT TO:

A DISCO BEAT POUNDS from a boom box. Mr. Melchoir watches contestants move in fast-paced, crisscrossing formations. Miss St. Paul SCREWS UP.

MR. MELCHOIR
(yelling over the music)
Hold on. Stop! Stop! Look, would it be easier if I had you crawl up to the mic, Sweetie? Oh, I know. Maybe you can write the steps on the ass of the girl ahead of you!

Miss St. Paul runs off CRYING.

MR. MELCHOIR (CONT)
Ed, go give her a hug, tell her you hate me too and drag her back in. Two hours! We only have two hours!

CUT TO:

Ed, Mr. Melchoir's assistant, holds a clipboard as he addresses the girls.

SUPER: EDWARD TOIVANEN - ASSISTANT CHOREOGRAPHER AND SENIOR LIGHTING DESIGNER FOR THE MINNESOTA MODELING ACADEMY

ED
... So, while dance is my passion, lighting, "pays the bills," as they say. I've been Senior Lighting Designer at the Academy...

CUT TO:

Ed writes on his clipboard as the contestants - in talent costumes - walk across the stage.

ED
Red. Next... blue. Next... red. Next... blue. Next... red.

MISS MINNEAPOLIS
I look too pink in red light.

ED
(with attitude)
Fine... BLUE! Next...

CUT TO:

INT. HOWARD JOHNSONS - HALLWAY - OUTSIDE WOMEN'S RESTROOM

A very mature MISS BURNSVILLE talks to camera.

MISS BURNSVILLE
... Okay, I been doin' it since I was twelve. A piece of Scotch Tape, pulled tight, just under the nipples, gives cleavage and makes the little soldiers stand at attention. I usually save it for nationals. That's where the real glamour is.

Amber exits the bathroom and Miss Burnsville rushes in.

AMBER
Hey, guys. Can you believe I'm actually here?! These girls are all so... classy, y'know? Don't tell anyone, but, I brought a secret weapon.

Amber pulls out a jar of Vaseline from her purse and smiles innocently.

CUT TO:

INT. HOWARD JOHNSONS - POOL AREA - SHELLFISH BUFFET

Contestants hungrily fill their plates with seafood.

JUMP CUT TO:

Amber stands beside the buffet, holding only a salad.

AMBER
I don't eat shellfish. Mom always says, "Don't never eat nothin' that can carry its house around with it - who knows the last time its been cleaned." She should know.

JUMP CUT TO:

Amber eats at a tall tiki table with Miss Minneapolis.

MISS MINNEAPOLIS
... I've been in about thirty-five pageants. I guess my most memorable one'd have to be Miss Teen America, 1995. It was in Vegas... My roommate blew Bob Barker.

SUPER: MR. BARKER WAS UNAVAILABLE FOR COMMENT

MISS MINNEAPOLIS (CONT)
For an old guy, he was so horny --

Amber stares at her with wide-eyed disbelief.

JUMP CUT TO:

MISS MINNEAPOLIS
... I wasn't Miss Teen Minnesota.
(slipping into southern accent)
I was Miss Teen Arkansas. It's where I'm from. Long story short. My mamma thought we should relocate before the biggies - Miss USA, Miss Universe, Miss World. The South is tough. In the circuit, the Midwest is known for havin' less competition and bein', y'know, an advantage at Nationals.

Amber's head is about to explode with this news.

AMBER
What do you mean?

MISS MINNEAPOLIS
Y'know, the "wholesome midwesterner" thang. If this was Arkansas, Alabama or God-forbid, Texas, I'd be worried sick. But take a peek at this herd... Not you, Cutie. I'm already figurin' out my "future ambitions" for Nationals. Right now I'm thinkin' I'll say, "I hope to work with retarded kids." They love that shit... Ooh-child - retarded kids - from the Midwest - I could take this puppy.

CUT TO:

Terry and Colleen stand in front of the stage, as a CONTESTANT plays an AMAZING VIOLIN SOLO. After a beat...

TERRY
Okay, okay, that's enough - I get it. I get it, more of the same - great, great. Real good. One suggestion, Sweetie? Try hikin' up your skirt a bit, then. Next.

"THEME FROM 2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY" STARTS. Miss Minneapolis steps ON STAGE - silver unitard, silver streamers, silver tap shoes. She starts a TAP ROUTINE that RIVALS AMBER'S.

AMBER
(whispering to camera)
Oh my God... Look at her, she's awesome. I should just go home now...

SUDDENLY Miss Minneapolis FREEZES.

MISS MINNEAPOLIS
Oh - Oh my God...
(doubling over in pain)
I·gotta go --

She runs off TOWARD THE RESTROOM.

COLLEEN
(calling after)
Well, you're gonna have to do somethin' with those nerves before Nationals. Thirty-million people aren't gonna wait while you run to the john.

Other waiting contestants SUDDENLY DOUBLE OVER, AD-LIBBING, "OH NO! OH MY GOD! I'M GONNA PUKE! ETC." More contestants GRAB THEIR BELLIES. SCREAMS OF PAIN. ["Theme from 2001..." continues throughout.] Suddenly, A CONTESTANT VOMITS, starting a CHAIN REACTION. It's beauty queens blowing chunks! Amber stands in the middle of this nightmare. Colleen and Terry RUN OUT!

TERRY/COLLEEN
Christ-almighty! Someone call an ambulance! Fuck it - call a priest!

DISSOLVE TO:

NEWS FOOTAGE: INT. HOWARD JOHNSONS - LOBBY

A FEMALE REPORTER talks to camera as stretchers of MOANING, CRYING girls pass behind. MEDIA CREWS are everywhere.

FEMALE REPORTER
... A salmonella dysentery outbreak, now traced to improperly refrigerated shellfish, is believed to be the cause. Joining us now is David Richardson, a member of the documentary crew filming the pageant. He was there when tragedy struck.

CAMERA WIDENS to include a CREW GUY.

CREW GUY
(unbelievably pumped)
Oh man, it was unbelievable - girls puking here, girls ralphin' up their guts over there. Damn, it was like a bad horror flick, y'know? (BLEEP)-ing beauty queens blowin' chunks everywhere! I've never seen anything like it and I live in L.A. -- Hey, Ed.

A GUY on a stretcher behind him gives a weak wave.

CREW GUY (CONT)
That's our sound guy.

FEMALE REPORTER
(hand on earpiece)
I'm sorry -- hold on a minute. Follow me, Chuck, I believe the State Board has just emerged with one of the contestants...

FOLLOW REPORTER as she RUNS OVER to Amber, Colleen and Terry. All three look dazed. Reporters SHOUT questions.

COLLEEN
(with forced sobriety)
People, people - wait, wait a minute, here. Uh, while we haven't ruled out sabotage from neighboring state pageants - Iowa, Wisconsin, North Dakota - the important thing is that we have a winner...

PULL BACK to REVEAL we're:

INT. MOUNT ROSE V.F.W. - BAR

The Mayor and other vets, watch Amber on the TV.

COLLEEN (ON TV)
And, on behalf of the Minnesota Modeling Academy, we proudly present Amber Conroy. Your new Minnesota Junior Miss America.

The place ERUPTS with CHEERS! ON TV: Terry sets a tiara on Amber's head. FLASHES.

MAYOR
Yah, ain't it just a kick in the fuckin' ass!?! I'll be a snake's prick if tragedy and pageants ain't got a way of bringin' folks together...
(directly at camera)
Yous boys tell me when want me to start, okay?...

CUT TO:

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - LIBRARY

IONA HILDEBRANDT
Amber?! What-the-hell's goin' on around here? I'm Mount Rose Junior Miss America. Where the hell's my tiara? I bet those sneaky little Japs took it...

CUT TO:

INT. CAFE - CONTINUOUS

Cathy and other townsfolk are glued to a small TV set on the counter.

FEMALE REPORTER (ON TV)
... Amber, how do you feel?

AMBER (ON TV)
(dazed and confused)
I, uh... I feel like... I, uh, I need a shower.

Townsfolk LAUGH and CHEER.

CATHY
Jesus-Mary-n-Joseph I hope Gladys Leeman hangs herself in her cell when she hears this.

ROUGH HAND HELD FOOTAGE - WOMEN'S PRISON "YARD"

Shot from outside the facility, we see GLADYS walking around the prison yard, holding onto the back of a LARGE BLACK WOMAN'S belt.

SUPER: VOICE OF GLADYS LEEMAN FROM STILLWATER WOMEN'S FACILITY

GLADYS (V.O. ON PHONE)
Yah-I still don't want an interview. I just wanna say - that little bitch better watch her back at Nationals 'cause I'm makin' friends on the inside... Yah-friends who have friends on the outside who can -

DEEP WOMAN'S VOICE (V.O. ON PHONE)
Let's go, Kitten.

GLADYS (V.O. ON PHONE)
Gotta go --

CLICK - DIAL TONE.

CUT TO:

EXT. LORETTA'S TRAILER

Amber and Loretta sit on the picnic table. Handmade "Congratulations" posters cover the lawn and trailer.

AMBER
... No, I can't! I just, I just can't believe it. I'm Minnesota's Junior Miss America!

JUMP CUT TO:

AMBER
Course, I feel bad for the three girls who died, and the two who lost the use of their legs and all --

LORETTA
But our baby's going to Nationals! Mobile, Alabama - look out!

AMBER/LORETTA
Ahhhhhh!

AMBER
I'm gonna be on the TV! Just like Diane Sawyer...

CUT TO:

INT. DAKOTA COUNTY EATING DISORDERS CLINIC - MARY'S ROOM

Mary, now bald, with oxygen tubes in her nose and an IV in each arm, whispers to the CANDY STRIPER.

CANDY STRIPER
Mary says... she'd like to wish Amber good luck at Nationals... She'll probably be nervous... and scared... but, she should still... eat...

We hear the LONG BEEP as Mary flat lines.

CANDY STRIPER (CONT)
Oh, God... Uh, um, uh... Code! Uh... shoot, um... Color code...
(trying to remember)
Uh... "Color code when you're feeling sad - red is dead and blue is bad." Blue! Blue! Code blue! Help-Code blue!

She runs out CALLING the code.

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL - ANNETTE'S ROOM

Annette's LEFT ARM HAS BEEN AMPUTATED. Amber sits beside her.

ANNETTE
... Yah-you-bet. I'm gettin' ready to go downtown, y'know, pinnin' up the sleeve for my stump when Loretta calls and says it's off! Girls are sick and my Amber's the winner! I thought they mighta screwed up my meds again --
(lifting stump)
Right after the operation, I was poppin' so many pills, I thought I was a black man in Vegas --

AMBER
Here's the signal I'm gonna give Mom when I'm on the TV.

Amber MIMES SMOKING a CIGARETTE.

ANNETTE
My little Carol Burnett. I love you much.

CUT TO:

CLOSE ON LARGE METAL SHED

Sign painted on side reads: "MOUNT ROSE AIR FIELD." PAN OVER to REVEAL, we're:

IN THE MIDDLE OF A CORN FIELD. The "runway" is a gravel path cut between rows of corn. A FOUR-SEATER PLANE is on the runway, in front of a group of TOWN FOLK with hand-made GOOD LUCK SIGNS. Amber [in Minnesota sash and tiara] and the Mayor stand beside the plane. [NOTE: THE PLANE NEVER MOVES.]

CUT TO:

MAYOR
(into bullhorn)
It's on? Okay. Here she is, Minnesota's Junior Miss America - soon to be the next America's Junior Miss America - our little Amber!

CHEERS!

MAYOR (CONT)
So, after Ted dusts the crops, he's takin' her to Mobile, Alabama!

CHEERS AGAIN! Amber takes the bullhorn.

AMBER
(into bullhorn)
Hey, guys. Thanks. Thank you. I'd just like to say that I'm really proud, y'know? I mean, it's been a pretty wild ride, but I'm gonna do my best, to be the best. See "y'all" in a week!

ZOOM IN ON AMBER.

SMASH CUT TO:

CLOSE ON AMBER'S SHOCKED FACE, looking up. PULL BACK to REVEAL we're:

ON A SIDEWALK - DOWNTOWN MOBILE, ALABAMA

SUPER: MOBILE, ALABAMA - SIX HOURS LATER

MUSIC UNDER: "PROUD TO BE AN AMERICAN" BY LEE GREENWOOD

PULL BACK FURTHER to reveal OTHER STATE WINNERS are frozen around Amber, all looking up. PAN UP BUILDING to a BROKEN SIGN: "NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS, JUNIOR MISS AMERICA." A "For Lease" sign is in the window. Only a CHAIR and an ANSWERING MACHINE remain.

DOCUMENTARIAN (V.O.)
And so, in its fiftieth year, the Junior Miss America Pageant was laid to rest. But, in its passing, we are inspired by young women like Amber Conroy. And we're reminded of the many who gave their lives in the pursuit of the title... Junior Miss America.

Suddenly, MISS TEXAS LOSES IT and RUNS FOR THE BUILDING - POUNDING ON THE WINDOW. Others follow, kicking the building, throwing themselves against the door, falling on the sidewalk, screaming to heaven. As the MUSIC SWELLS, AMBER STANDS FROZEN ON THE SIDEWALK...

SCROLL OVER CONTINUING PANDEMONIUM:

IN MEMORY OF...

MARY JOHANSON
FORMER MOUNT ROSE JUNIOR MISS AMERICA

REBECCA ANN LEEMAN
MOUNT ROSE JUNIOR MISS AMERICA

LISA JANUSCH
BURNSVILLE'S JUNIOR MISS AMERICA

MICHELLE PETRILLA
APPLE VALLEY'S JUNIOR MISS AMERICA

LESLIE BURKHALTER
ST. PAUL'S JUNIOR MISS AMERICA

FADE OUT:

LOUD ROCKIN' MUSIC UP

FADE IN:

EXT. HARDWARE HANK

It's a lovely shot of the front window.

SUPER: HAROLD VILMES DIED UNEXPECTEDLY OF LYMES DISEASE FROM A DEER TICK BITE...

Suddenly, HANK, buck naked, runs back and forth past the window, spanking himself and waving "hi."

SUPER CONT: LEAVING HANK THE STORE.

DIP TO BLACK:

INT. STILLWATER WOMEN'S FACILITY

Outside a MAXIMUM SECURITY CELL DOOR. A large FEMALE GUARD unlocks and opens the door.

SUPER: GLADYS LEEMAN AGREED TO HER FIRST INTERVIEW SINCE HER SENTENCING.

CAMERA moves into the room. No one's there. The nervous guard looks around. CAMERA TURNS and catches sight of a PRISON GOWN AND LEGS dangling behind the door. A shoe drops.

SUPER: "JESUS LOVES WINNERS" WAS ALL THE NOTE SAID.

DIP TO BLACK:

EXT. MINNEAPOLIS SCHOOL OF BEAUTY

A very perky LESLIE MILLER, with very big hair, stands out front in a white lab coat. She smiles and waves to camera.

SUPER: LESLIE MILLER ENTERED "THE MINNEAPOLIS SCHOOL OF BEAUTY," WORKING HER WAY THROUGH AS A DANCER...

STILL PICTURE - A SEEDY BAR

A slightly less perky Leslie, wearing go-go boots and a smile, dances in a cage.

SUPER: SHE WAS LAST HEARD FROM SOMEWHERE IN THE PHILIPPINES. IF YOU SEE HER, PLEASE CALL 1-800-876-4617.

DIP TO BLACK:

SUPER: "TINA HOWARD" RAN AWAY, CHANGED HER NAME BACK TO "SEIKO" AND RETURNED TO JAPAN...

FADE IN:

CONCERT FOOTAGE of SEIKO - on stage in front of thousands of adoring fans.

SUPER: WHERE SHE BECAME THE BIGGEST STAR IN THE HISTORY OF JAPAN.

DIP TO BLACK:

EXT. MOUNT ROSE - STREET

MOLLY HOWARD is being helped into a van with "LUTHERAN CHILDREN'S ORPHANAGE" painted on the side. She looks sad.

SUPER: MOLLY HOWARD RETURNED TO THE "LUTHERAN CHILDREN'S ORPHANAGE" AFTER HER PARENTS WERE GUNNED DOWN BY A SNIPER OUTSIDE THE RED OWL.

EXT. MAIN STREET - RED OWL GROCERY STORE

SUPER: AFTER A SIX HOUR STAND-OFF, IONA HILDEBRANDT GAVE HERSELF UP AND WAS LATER CHARGED WITH THEIR DEATHS.

IONA HILDEBRANDT, wearing Army Fatigues, is led away in cuffs by members of a S.W.A.T. team.

DIP TO BLACK:

LOCAL NEWSCAST: FEMALE REPORTER is on the scene of the Hildebrandt stand-off outside TOM'S RED OWL. We see AMBER, ANNETTE (with hook hand) and other TOWN FOLK behind her, watching the action. "LIVE" flashes ON SCREEN.

SUPER: DURING THE SIX HOUR HILDEBRANDT STAND-OFF...

The FEMALE REPORTER suddenly stiffens and falls over.

SUPER: LOCAL REPORTER PAT MILES WAS STRUCK BY A STRAY POLICE BULLET.

Amber steps under the police barricade, over Pat's body, takes the mic and continues the newscast. She's a natural...

SUPER: AMBER, SHOWING AMAZING POISE UNDER PRESSURE, WAS GIVEN HER JOB.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. MINNEAPOLIS NEWS STATION

Amber, now looking like a midwestern news anchor, sits with a BLOND MALE ANCHOR. As they smile and laugh, we:

FADE OUT.

THE END.